

DOSSIER*Teaching practices of undergraduate teacher trainers***The university as a *locus* for the construction of the professional practice of the beginning teacher educator*****A universidade como *lôcus* da construção da prática profissional do professor formador iniciante*****Elizabete Volkman^a**

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the professional practice of beginning teacher educators and is guided by the following question: How do beginning teacher educators build up their professional practice in teaching courses? The study aims to analyze the constitution of the professional practice of beginning teacher educators in the education process of teaching undergraduate courses. The concept of “beginning teacher” is supported by Marcelo Garcia (1999). This is qualitative, exploratory research and the data was collected using questionnaires, education memory reports, and narrative interviews with 23 beginning teacher educators working in the education and language teaching undergraduate courses in two public universities in the state of Paraná. Discursive Text Analysis (Moraes; Galiuzzi, 2007) was used to treat the data. The research findings revealed common elements identified in the construction of the teaching professional practice such as the responsibility related to being a teacher educator, teaching as a complex activity, and the influence of more experienced teacher educators and students in the development of pedagogical practices.

Keywords: Teaching Professional Practice. Beginning Teacher Educator. University.

RESUMO

O artigo versa sobre a prática profissional do professor formador iniciante e se orienta pela questão: Como os professores formadores iniciantes das licenciaturas constroem a sua prática profissional docente? O estudo tem como objetivo analisar como se constitui a prática profissional dos professores formadores iniciantes nos processos formativos nas licenciaturas. Para o conceito de “professor iniciante”, apoia-se em Marcelo Garcia (1999). A pesquisa é de cunho qualitativo e exploratório e os dados foram produzidos por questionários, memorial de formação e entrevistas narrativas com 23 professores iniciantes que atuam nos cursos de Pedagogia e Letras de duas universidades públicas paranaenses. Os dados foram tratados por meio da Análise Textual Discursiva (Moraes; Galiuzzi, 2007). Os achados da pesquisa revelam elementos que

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foram identificados como comuns na construção da prática profissional docente, como a responsabilidade relacionada ao ser professor formador; a docência como atividade complexa; e a influência de professores formadores experientes e dos licenciandos na constituição das práticas pedagógicas.

Palavras-chave: Prática Profissional Docente. Professor Formador Iniciante. Universidade.

Introduction

Discussing the university as a locus of activity for beginning teacher educators is essential as it provides important insights into university organization processes and the challenges it faces today. The emergence of universities in Brazil dates back to the colonial era, when the country was politically, economically, and organizationally dependent on the Portuguese court. Attempts to implement higher education in Brazil lasted for centuries and were only successful with the transfer of the Portuguese royal court to Brazil in 1808. Before that period, Brazilians had to complete their university education in Portugal or in European countries.

The transfer of the Portuguese court to Brazil resulted in the need for qualified professionals to cater for the new demands, which led to the creation of higher education courses to meet such demands, both in the military aspect, for the defense of the colony, and for the qualification of labor.

The university organizational model, partly inspired in the French model, highlighted the character of an autonomous school, with greater emphasis on exact and technological sciences and, consequently, less emphasis on the humanities (Masetto, 1998). Separate departmentalization is also a strong feature of this type of university organization, with serialized curricula and closed programs that include courses focused on training professionals in a specific area of specialization (Masetto, 1998).

Another important milestone in university organization in Brazil is the 1968 university reform (Brasil, 1968). Although implemented in a context of deteriorating civil rights, it was inspired by many of the ideas of the student movement, such as the establishment of the department as the minimum unit of teaching and the abolition of the chair in Brazilian universities, making decision-making more democratic. Departmentalization aimed to democratize the university by eliminating the power of the chairs and transferring decision-making to the faculty. However, departmentalization meant something else. According to Chauí (2001, p. 48), it aimed at maximum efficiency with minimum investment, bringing together all related subjects in a single department so that courses could be offered in a single space without increasing the faculty (Chauí, 2001).

When analyzing the historical trajectory of universities in Brazil, traces of European and North American models are identified, which predominated during a given period and still retain their remnants in the organization of Brazilian HEIs. The most important are the Jesuit, French, and German models. In the Jesuit model, teaching followed the scholastic method, which had been in use since the 12th century. In this teaching model, knowledge was considered finished and complete; it needed only to be transmitted and memorized. The professor's role was to transmit knowledge

through expository classes, accompanied by consolidation exercises and rigorous assessment. The professor was seen as a priest, a fundamental element in the effectiveness of the method (Saviani, 2010).

The French university system also had a significant influence on the university model in Brazil. Since their creation, Brazilian universities have adopted the Franco-Napoleonic model, characterized by a professional organization centered on courses and faculties (Masetto, 1998). For Pimenta and Anastasiou (2010), this university model keeps the characteristics of the Jesuit model.

Brazilian universities were also influenced by the German or Humboldtian model, such as the German characteristic of prioritizing knowledge production, separating teaching and research. In this context, this separation was established by making undergraduate programs responsible for teaching and graduate programs responsible for research. The separation between teaching and research met the educational objectives of the military dictatorship, which consisted in preventing any encouragement of criticism and human emancipation in undergraduate programs that could threaten the current regime. It was in this context that the path was paved for the establishment of a functional university, a fundamental step in the transformation of the university from a social institution to an organizational university (Chauí, 2003).

Regarding teaching, it is understood as knowledge transmission, aimed at preparing students for the job market. Teaching, in this sense, ceases to be education and becomes training. Research also follows the operational pattern, being fragmented and aiming at a strategy of intervention and control of means or instruments to achieve a defined objective (Chauí, 2003, p. 7). In this neoliberal context, public universities experience a dilemma: the conflict between education based on human capital theory, aimed at training a workforce for the job market, and education inspired by the theory of human emancipation (Severino, 2008; Chauí, 2001).

As regards the state of Paraná, it is important to emphasize that it has the largest number of universities supported by the state government, with seven public state universities. This context brings to light many conflicts, research, and debates regarding university education, making undergraduate programs a field for reflection on teachers' education in the state.

The theoretical-methodological perspective of the investigation

This study was developed in two public universities in Paraná, located in different regions of the state. The universities were selected based on their academic proximity to the researchers and their access to the research subjects. To select the participating universities, we used the following criteria: being public state universities and being located in different regions of the state. To prevent identification of the participant universities, we will refer to them as U1 and U2. U1 and U2 are considered important universities in their regions, qualifying most of the education professionals working in the region. The research field also includes two undergraduate programs: Literature and

Education, offered by the two universities investigated. The undergraduate programs were selected based on their curricular structure to select a sample of undergraduate teaching program types.

The research agents (subjects) were selected according to the following criteria: being a professor of the Literature and Education degree programs, having a maximum of five years of experience as a higher education professor, and agreeing to sign the Informed Consent Form, totaling 23 professors. According to the data, most of the subjects were women, representing 82.6% of the total number of participants. The participants' age range between 27 and 52 years.

Regarding faculty workload, most faculty members (70%) work as collaborating professors and report spending more than 20 hours in the classroom, leaving little or no time for other activities such as research and outreach. According to the internal regulations of the universities investigated, collaborators working 40 hours per week would have an average classroom workload of 16 hours at U1 and a maximum of 18 hours at U2.

When analyzing the research participants' profiles, we found that most of the beginning professors (86.9%) work at only one HEI. However, some still need to work at more than one institution, sometimes more than two HEIs, due to the precarious employment contracts of temporary professors, especially those with a 20-hour weekly workload contract. As explained in the profiles of the universities studied, Decree 9.028/2018 of the State of Paraná no longer allows for the hiring of full-time temporary staff (Paraná, 2018).

Considering professional qualification, 39.1% of beginning professors hold a doctorate, and 13.0% have completed postdoctoral studies, demonstrating a profile of professionally qualified beginning professors. Most professors (80.9%) hold teaching degrees; however, a small percentage (9.5%) only hold bachelor's degrees (psychology, languages). Of the professors surveyed, 23.7% have bachelor's degrees, such as dentistry, psychology, mathematics, or physical education, and a second degree in undergraduate or postgraduate education programs.

As regards professional experience, only two participating professors had never worked in basic education. Most beginning professors began their teaching careers at this level, in both public and private schools. Of the professors participating in the study, 13% had worked for more than 20 years in basic education, and 78.2% had between one and five years of experience in that field.

Regarding their experience in higher education, most of the agents (subjects) in our study have between four and five years of experience in higher education institutions (HEIs), with 38.1% having one to three years of experience. As for their professional status, over 90% of the agents work as collaborating professors, and only two beginning professors are tenured. This may be related to the long period without public selection processes for teaching positions in the state of Paraná and to the education policies implemented in recent years.

During the research development phase, researchers must keep an ethical posture and obtain approval from the Ethics Committee. After approval, research data production was carried out in three stages, aiming at careful data production: in the first stage, the questionnaire was sent; the second step consisted in the completion of the education report by the beginning professors;

and the third stage was the narrative interview. For organization, aid in the categorization, and triangulation of the data, we used Discursive Textual Analysis (DTA) as an analytical tool. The three instruments used enabled careful objectification of the facts gathered in the field investigated (Bourdieu, Chamboredon, Passeron, 2007).

The teacher educator, the education process and teaching at university

The university, as an education institution, can be considered a unique professional system, “[...] which directly affects how its staff perform their duties and carry out the professional activities assigned to them” (Zabalza, 2004, p. 105). Likewise, it plays a role in the education of citizens as an institution with a social function and integration into the society in which it operates. However, according to the same author, many dimensions define the university’s action, some of which may be interrelated. For purposes of definition, we will focus on the professional and institutional aspects of university teaching.

University teaching, despite not being sufficiently valued, constitutes the essence of the university as an education institution. Teaching, conceived as a professional activity, requires scientific mastery of the specialty, that is, mastery of the specific knowledge and expertise of teaching. As a specialized activity, teaching has its own defined scope of knowledge. Thus, it “requires specific preparation for its practice” (Zabalza, 2004, p. 108).

Teaching in higher education has its own specificities and differs in some aspects from teaching in basic education. Soares and Cunha (2010, p. 23) emphasize that university teaching “is a highly complex activity, not restricted to the classroom.” The knowledge and skills required to teach are closely related to teaching research activities. Pimenta and Anastasiou (2010), agree with the authors and emphasize that university teaching can be considered a constant process of scientific and critical knowledge seeking and construction. Teaching in higher education is focused on student education, that is, on ensuring learning and the construction of professional knowledge. This “requires a multiplicity of knowledge, skills, and attitudes” from educators, which “need to be appropriated and understood in their relationships (Soares; Cunha, 2010, p. 24).

Pimenta and Anastasiou (2010, p. 13) identify some areas of knowledge considered essential for teaching in higher education, which are organized into four main areas, namely,

content from the various areas of knowledge and teaching; pedagogical content, linked to educational practice in the classroom; didactic-pedagogical content related to professional practice; and content linked to personal and social development, linked to the “meaning of human existence”.

Thus, university teaching requires a range of knowledge and, more than that, also encompasses the relationship that the teacher educator maintains with their professional knowledge and with teaching.

Corroborating the authors' findings, Zabalza (2004) adds that teaching is an activity that requires consistent knowledge about the subject, student learning, teaching resources, and how they will be conducted. Many demands are placed on professors working in undergraduate programs: "They must not only be good scientists or good administrators, but also good educators," they are not only responsible for the education of future teachers but also for guiding the foundational aspects of a profession (Imbernón, 2011, p. 20).

Direct action on teacher education contains elements linked to the interpersonal and influential relationships that teacher educators keep with their students, as well as the type of information and reflections it provides. Reflections and debates on teaching situations and the profession directly or indirectly influence the conceptions of teaching that undergraduates, future teachers, will form about the profession. Therefore, we emphasize the importance of the political, ethical, and pedagogical education of future professors, aspects that must be part of professors' education as a way of defending an emancipatory educational project for undergraduate students in teaching courses.

Teaching as an educational practice is also a way of intervening in social reality. The public university, as an education institution, must play its role in defending quality public education. Chauí (2001, p. 37) presents a critique in this regard when addressing the role of universities

Public universities have accepted passively the destruction of public education in elementary and high school, the privatization of education at this level, the increased inequalities in education and a system that reinforces privileges because it guarantees public higher education to wealthier classes and groups in society [...].

Defending public schools requires solid and consistent education of future teachers as agents of social transformation. Rapid and complex changes in society require the development of a professional teaching profile "with an integrated worldview, competent performance, and commitment to political, sociocultural, technical-scientific, ecological, aesthetic, moral, and ethical issues" (Melo, 2007, p. 94). There is no doubt that we are facing an expansion of teaching, which poses challenges for professors in higher education.

The following session shows how beginning teacher educators understand university teaching and also analyzes how those professionals build up their professional teaching practice within universities.

Being a beginning teacher educator

Teaching encompasses a process of continuous development, of becoming a teacher through formative and practical experiences. Professional education and professional development are marked by phases in the teaching career. Huberman (2013) conceptualizes career phases as the professors life cycles, marked by events that characterize them. These phases that professors

go through throughout their careers are neither linear nor fixed, but rather constitute trends (Huberman, 2013).

The early career phase is characterized as the start of professional socialization, marked by learning and conflict between the professor and the institutional culture. Teaching initiation can be characterized as a period in which the professor strives to meet the demands of the institution, students, and the educational system, attempting to “achieve a certain level of confidence in how they deal with everyday problems and issues” (Marcelo, 1999, p. 114). The entrance into the teaching career oscillates between the difficulties encountered in the profession and the enthusiasm for the discoveries that teaching offers. This formative period is marked by reality shocks and the struggle for professional survival (Marcelo Garcia, 1999). It is during this period of teaching that many young professors decide to give up the profession (Romanowski; Martins, 2013).

The transition experienced at the start of the career is marked by stabilization, which occurs when the professor acquires confidence in their performance and a definitive commitment to the profession (Huberman, 2013). The first two phases of the career are part of professional socialization, when teachers consolidate their knowledge and skills, building their pedagogical practices.

It seems important to emphasize that the professional teaching practice development is tied to the concept of university teaching expressed by teacher educators. In our study, we identified, within the category of *being a teacher educator*, how beginning teacher educators conceptualize teaching and the role of teacher educators at the university. Data from the questionnaire, the report, and the narrative interviews revealed that most of the 23¹ research participants consider being a teacher educator to involve multiple responsibilities.

[...] when I started rather nervously, with certain insecurity, although I already worked with teacher education in the education system, I felt that working at university entails another view and another reality and responsibility, because working with in service teacher education is one thing, but working with students who are going to start their initiation in this space is a much greater responsibility, because you become a role model for them (P21E).

The feeling of responsibility for the undergraduate's education and insecurity regarding such education process permeated the beginning of teaching for the beginning professors who participated in the study. Beginning professors are aware of the responsibility for their teaching practices and discourses, since reflections and debates on teaching and the teaching profession directly or indirectly influence the conceptions of teaching those students will develop (Zabalza, 2004).

¹ The participant professors were identified by the letter P followed by a number, according to the order of answers to the questionnaire. When referring to data collected by means of the questionnaire, after the professor's identification, letter Q will appear; if the data was collected from the interview, letter E will be used in the identification, and letter M will identify the report.

The commitment to educating future teachers becomes a complex task that requires professors to possess a range of knowledge and skills that are reflected in the development of professional practice, especially for beginning professors. The sense of responsibility those professors reported is related to the conception of teaching that is ingrained in society, which disseminates a discourse of blame and accountability for educational outcomes. State control over teaching and the pressure for quantitative results generate hegemonic discourses of teachers' accountability (Nóvoa, 1999).

The prophecies of salvation through schooling provoke professors' excessive ambitions and tend to make them liable for all failure in education reforms. They mask the fact that education problems are economic, political, social and cultural problems [...] (Silva, 2018, p. 55).

The act of assigning responsibility to professors is internalized by them, who end up feeling guilty for their undergraduates' education outcome. This responsibility for teaching can be considered part of an education committed to human emancipation. However, accepting individual responsibility for the education of future teachers can be problematic, since the professor does not have complete control over their undergraduates' education.

University teaching is a complex activity, encompassing several factors that go beyond professors' responsibilities in the classroom, ranging from public education policies to students' engagement. Sacristán (1999, p. 67) emphasizes that "the teaching profession does not hold exclusive liability for the education activity, due to the existence of more general influences (political, economic, cultural)." However, the professional teaching culture, which imbues the profession with individualism, also contributes to instilling in professors a process of individual accountability. For Marcelo (2009), the belief that everything depends on the professors and that they are solely responsible for whatever happens in their classroom reinforces the professors' sense of individual responsibility. The participant beginning professors emphasized that this sense of responsibility for their education extends to the future teachers' teaching practice.

[...] I understand that what we are transmitting to these students in the classroom will be multiplied in basic education, then I feel "co-responsible" for the education of all children that will be taught by these professionals (P23M).

The feeling of responsibility is mixed with feelings of frustration and insecurity regarding the education of future teachers. Undergraduates' attitudes, observed by the professors, create the feeling that the education process is failing in some way, and teacher educators end up blaming themselves, especially the beginning professors, who are still developing as teachers' educators. Responsibility for the education of undergraduates may be related to the teachers' self-identification as teacher educators.

Formosinho (2009, p. 81) considers that teachers in initial teacher education courses "can assume their role as educators or ignore the professional dimensions of their teaching." According to that author, in general, teachers of curricular components linked to practical qualification,

such as teachers of curriculum, didactics, and teaching practices, define themselves as educators (Formosinho, 2009). How we define ourselves is related to how each person feels and describes themselves as a teacher (Nóvoa, 1999).

When beginning professors recognize themselves as educators, they also undertake the social commitment that the teacher qualification grants them.

I see that this is really the education issue, it's about contributing to the initial education of that person and the person continuing so that the education does not finish there. The opportunity of educating workers, we teach individuals who are real workers in teaching courses, it is a matter of commitment also with public education, what we desire for workers, this fight of resistance, for something better and transforming for them too (P21E).

For the beginning teacher educators who participated in the study, their role as educators is to provide learning and knowledge that enable pre-service teachers to face the challenges of public schools. This preparation of future teachers was emphasized as a social commitment they made to teaching during their undergraduate program. The commitment to teacher education is not limited solely to the teaching practice, “but its reflection permeates the walls of the institution,” with the goal of “achieving people’s emancipation” (Imbernón, 2011, p. 42). That author emphasizes the importance of educators’ social commitment to the education of pre-service teachers, arguing that teaching “moves in a delicate balance between professional tasks (some authors call them academic) and the structure of social participation” (Imbernón, 2011, p. 30).

Teaching requires understanding reality; teaching cannot be thought of as detached from the broader social context (Veiga, 2009). This aspect of teaching was emphasized by the beginning professors, who recognized the importance of understanding the education reality, as well as their social commitment to public schools, highlighting their role in providing scientific, methodological, and human education for undergraduates, with the goal of promoting their empowerment.

A sense of responsibility, the concept of teaching as a complex activity and a way of intervening in social reality, combined with a commitment to the working class, were identified as constitutive elements of the professional practice of the participating beginning professors.

Another important element related to the concept of teaching in undergraduate programs, highlighted by the beginning professors, refers to the influence of teacher educators on undergraduate students. Most beginning professors recognize that they are role models for future teachers.

Many students will mirror our actions, they even comment in the classroom and I've heard it many times, “that professor is very good, I want to be like that professor”, or sometimes other types of comments “he studies a lot, but does not put into practice”, we are role models for these students too (P22E).

By undertaking their role as educators, beginning professors acknowledge that they can become a role model in the undergraduate students’ professional practice. Part of the sense of

responsibility these professors expressed stems from recognizing the influence educators have on students. Teacher education scholars, such as Imbernón (2011) and Formosinho (2009), agree that “the models from which future teachers learn are perpetuated through the practice of their teaching profession, as these models become, even involuntarily, a guideline for their actions” (Imbernón, 2011, p. 65). The student experience, which generates practices, is not based solely on what the teacher says or teaches; the most subtle and lasting influence occurs indirectly, through the professors’ attitudes and behaviors.

Regarding the influence of educators, an important piece of information that emerged from the narratives of beginning teacher educators concerns the profile of university students. According to Zabalza (2004, p. 116), university students “are at a level of maturity that allows them to separate good from bad,” that is, what can be an example and what cannot be followed, as well as what is inconsistent with the professor’s attitude and what is consistent with their own. This aspect was emphasized by the beginning professors who participated in the study.

They talk a lot about that, that they can distinguish professors that preach one type of theory in the classroom but practice something else, and the professor who tells you how to behave in the classroom, because that’s what he/she does, I think it is something like that (P23E).

Teaching can be considered “an intellectual activity and a technical activity; a moral activity and a relational activity” (Formosinho, 2009, p. 91). In agreement with that author, the relational dimension between professor and student in the undergraduate program was emphasized by Hobold and Buendgens (2015) as an important influencer on the practices of future teachers.

When exercising the professional activity, the educator influences directly the education and pedagogical conception of the future teacher. This is not only about content, but rather a way to work with them, and the values associated with it that act directly in their education and can be considered a model in learning how to teach (Hobold; Buendgens, 2015, p. 200).

For those authors, not only the content, but also the way educators present it and interact with students, leave their mark on the professional practice of undergraduates. An important dimension of educators’ professional practice is related to the meaning they attribute to teaching (Nóvoa, 1999; Veiga, 2009). The concept of teaching expressed by educators becomes a guide for their teaching practice. Emphasizing the relational dimension of educational practice, as the research participants emphasized, reveals a concept of teaching as an influential and affective practice, which differs from the conception of teaching as content transmission.

The university as the locus of construction of the professional practice of beginning teacher educators in teaching undergraduate courses

Becoming a professor can be considered a complex process that involves personal and professional experiences at both the individual and social levels. Even before beginning their teaching careers, professors, like their students, bring with them concepts about teaching developed throughout their personal and professional careers. Initiation into teaching triggers a process of revisiting experiences about the educational process that can influence professors' practices.

In our analysis of the teaching development process, we found that beginning professors refer to their professional trajectories and student experiences to inform their teaching practices in undergraduate programs and reframe them according to the demands of undergraduate teaching. We identified that the university has a dual influence on the development of beginning professors' professional practices: *their experience as undergraduate students and their experience as professors in undergraduate teaching courses*.

The professors who took part in the research reported that their *experience as undergraduate students* supported their professional practice as beginning teacher educators:

I also think about those professors who were role models for me, while I was an undergraduate, then I think what type of lesson they gave and what called my attention in them, but there are other professors that make me think 'this is not good, I don't agree with this practice, I'll try not to repeat this with my students', we work a lot following the example also, what we consider good in other people's practice and what we don't (P11E).

When beginning their teaching careers in undergraduate programs, professors sought support from their initial education experiences to inform their teaching practice. The influence of undergraduate faculty members and the way content was taught during their initial education are highlighted by professors as guiding principles for their teaching practice (Imbernón, 2011). It is important to highlight that beginning professors referred to notes and books used during their undergraduate studies to build a pedagogical repertoire based on the professional practice of their instructors.

I always think about that because the professors that marked me the most and helped me a lot to be the professor I'm today, and for life, [...] wonderful professors who marked me, not only for the way they taught, but for the human being they were, their smile, the way they entered the classroom, the way they understood students, the way they behaved with their students, this marked me a lot, and this mark remains until today (P5E).

With their reports, we could infer that beginning professors, in the process of constituting themselves as professionals, had the influence of more experienced professors they worked with,

and were marked by them, both their colleagues and professors they had during their teaching education.

Learning to teach is also shaped by the discovery of new things (Marcelo Garcia, 1999). “Although beginning professors have spent thousands of hours in schools,” observing and learning from their professors and peers, “they are unfamiliar with the specific situation in which they begin teaching” (Marcelo Garcia, 1999, p. 114). Despite having experience in basic education, most of the beginning professors agreed that teaching in higher education presents specificities that make it a new field of activity. Thus, professors seek pedagogical survival strategies that allow them to reflect on the new situation (Marcelo Garcia, 1999).

According to Silva (2018), the teaching practice is the starting point for reflection, which can remain an uncritical analysis of the practice itself, or it can trigger critical reflections on teaching. We found that the research participants, despite admitting to being influenced by the practices of their educators and coworkers, reveal that, in some aspects, they seek to break with the practices by which they were educated.

When I studied in the first graduation course at the X university, I saw that the professor/student relationship was rather distant, and that a lot of responsibility was ascribed to students as if they were ready in higher education, and one of the things I see, not only related to professors working in teaching courses, is to understand that students are also individuals in development. I think it is like this, school practice, reference, dialogue between reference and practice, and at the same time a human look at the students (P23E).

The reports highlight how some of the educators’ pedagogical practices were significant, but in a negative way, so much so that the research participants reveal that they act in ways that are contrary to those of their undergraduate professors. The beginning professors reflect on their educators’ teaching practices and reconfigure their own practices according to the university teaching context. Professional teaching conduct “can be a simple adaptation to the conditions and requirements imposed by pre-established contexts, but it can also adopt a critical perspective, stimulating thought and the ability to adopt intelligent strategic decisions to intervene in the context” (Sacristán, 1999, p.74).

The research data revealed that the beginning professors reevaluated their experience as undergraduates, seeking to develop new ways of teaching. The relational dimension of teacher education (Hobold; Buendgens, 2015) was highlighted by the beginning professors as an important aspect of the teacher education process in undergraduate programs, with an emphasis on affection and empathy for students.

[...] then, what worries me most in teacher education is this more effective and emotional preparation, rather than the intellectual only, because the professional must be complete, this is a matter of concern, they are not prepared for the school challenges, mainly in public schools since the challenges are huge (P11E).

Affection in the relationship between teacher and student was associated, by the research agents (subjects), with the commitment to educating teachers who perceive the affective aspect as part of the teaching-learning process. This fact was highlighted by Hobold and Buendgens (2015, p. 199), when they emphasized that “[...] even in the relationship with adult students, whether in undergraduate or postgraduate courses, the relationship and affection surround the teaching and learning process”.

The experiences of the participant beginning professors were informed by their experiences as undergraduate students. However, the context in which their undergraduates are educated differs from that of their experience, and these professors need to reconfigure their practices to reflect the concrete reality of their undergraduates’ education process.

We found that the knowledge base that most informed the pedagogical practices of the beginning professors came from their experience as undergraduate students and from professors who were their colleagues (Formosinho 2009). This may be related to the lack of specific education for university teaching. Master’s and doctoral programs are geared toward developing researchers. Except for mandatory teaching internships for postgraduate scholarship holders, content related to university teaching is rarely covered in *stricto sensu* training (Pimenta; Anastasiou, 2010).

The beginning professors admit that they sought support from their experiences as undergraduate students and from references from university professors to support their practices, often reproducing the actions of the professors who were a reference in their formative trajectory, according to the reports:

What I learned in my graduation course and afterwards in my Master’s and Doctorate courses, they were fundamental, but they were clearer for me and they became more significant and stronger in me with my experience and work at the university (P5M).

However, despite reproducing the practices of their teacher educators, over time, they began to reflect on and modify their actions, as the knowledge acquired during undergraduate studies gained significance in their teaching practice, becoming more meaningful. Thus, the *experience as a teacher in undergraduate programs* redefined the teaching experience experienced during their initial education and led to reflections on teaching and teaching practice. For Cunha (2007), it is in the confrontation between theoretical knowledge and practical experience that teachers reflect, analyze, and compare aspects of social and educational reality. In the process of constructing their professional identity, teachers reflect on their actions and make choices that influence their way of acting (Nóvoa, 1999).

Practical action can be considered “an activity that generates intellectual culture,” thus, “the problems of practice are not hollow or devoid of scientific foundation, but rather contradictions that practice itself generates” (Sacristán, 1999, p. 69). It is in this sense that practice is increasingly valued as a space for the construction of knowledge, making experience a point of reflection.

Experience as a student and now as a beginning professor generates actions and constitutes the construction of the beginning educators' professional practice. The professors describe how their experience in the undergraduate program has shaped their teaching practice.

[...] I constituted myself as a professor by experimenting to see what would work, both in relation to the large group of professors and the students. Then, I think I shaped myself with professors and students, learning together, I see that I learned to be a professor in higher education through experiences and challenges, sometimes what worked in one class didn't work out so well in another, and I had to adapt, and this helped me. This did not make me give up or feel tired or become hopeless, on the contrary (P5E).

The beginning of their teaching careers in undergraduate programs for the beginning professors in our study was marked by practical experiences, that is, they tested pedagogical practices, some of which were successful, while others "didn't work out so well" (P5E). It's interesting to note that experimenting with methodological options was highlighted by the professors as a pedagogical strategy, a way of learning to teach in their own practice. The first years of their careers are characterized by being, "generally, an intense trial-and-error learning process in most cases (Marcelo Garcia, 1999, p. 114).

The comparison of knowledge acquired during the initial education and the practical experience as undergraduate professors formed the basis for the development of the professional practice of the participant educators. Thus, the teaching experience during the undergraduate program generated reflections on professional performance and, consequently, the redefinition of pedagogical practices. However, the appreciation of practical knowledge at the beginning of a career can be worrying if it is not compared with the knowledge acquired during the initial education and other professional development courses.

The complexity of teaching in higher education "involves unique conditions and demands a multiplicity of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that need to be appropriated and understood in their relationships" (Soares; Cunha, 2010). Thus, it is in the teaching practice that the knowledge and wisdom inherent to teaching are acquired, which need to be related to each specific context of action. The problems of professional teaching practice are not limited to instrumental issues; they require teachers to "make decisions in an area of great complexity, uncertainty, singularity, and conflicting values" (Nóvoa, 1995, p. 27).

The situations in which professors must act pedagogically have unique characteristics, as well as unique responses (Nóvoa, 1995). Based on the research data, we can infer that the beginning professors use pedagogical strategies aimed at solving practical problems. However, the beginning professors emphasized the need for continuous study. For most of the participant beginning professors, theoretical knowledge becomes an important part of teaching in the undergraduate program.

I think that the teacher educator is a researcher, researching their own practice, and such researcher needs to have a theoretical background to support what they believe, what they defend as a professor, because we need to have a conception so that we don't get lost in relation to what we believe, and what has been imposed by the system, [...] I always think, this constant movement of study, research, reflection, all together so that we know where to sought support when feeling weak, then, it would be the research, the theoretical knowledge (P14E).

The participant teacher educators recognize the importance of theoretical knowledge for their teaching practice. The appreciation of specific knowledge has always been linked to teaching in higher education; since the creation of universities, professors have been recognized for their mastery of specific knowledge (Pimenta; Anastasiou, 2010). Far from minimizing the value of specific theoretical knowledge, we emphasize its importance in linking it to didactic knowledge and other specific knowledge and skills of teaching. Teaching in undergraduate programs can be considered a complex activity, requiring a multiplicity of knowledge (Soares; Cunha, 2010). Furthermore, "professors' knowledge of the content to be taught also influences *how* to teach (Marcelo, 2009, p. 115).

In addition to theoretical knowledge, the beginning professors cited didactic knowledge and interpersonal relationships with students as important elements in building their professional teaching practice.

This higher education professor, who works in teaching courses, first, he must have a well-founded theoretical perspective, from the philosophical, psychological and didactic standpoint, and must know which perspective to follow. This has to do with the view he has of society, humankind, and education. The first thing is this theoretical perspective that will support his work, because this will help him to organize his planning, help him prepare the lessons, and have a coherent view of evaluation, one that is not unfair (P21E).

In the university environment, mainly the human sciences area, there is a consensus regarding the importance of pedagogical and didactic knowledge (Pimenta; Anastasiou, 2010). Among the theoretical-practical knowledge needed to teach, the participant professors emphasized their experience in basic education as an essential element in teaching undergraduate courses.

I believe that the professor who worked in basic education and then started to work in higher education, the way he will approach certain topics is different from the method used by someone who never taught in basic education [...], then I see it as a differential for the higher education professor. I'm not saying this is a rule or that other professors who never worked in basic education won't be good professors, but if they had it, it would be great (P21E).

Beginning teacher educators believe that working in basic education provides a different perspective on the teaching-learning process, a more empathetic and understanding perspective.

Experience in basic education, according to the research participants, also allows teacher educators to more effectively discuss the school's demands, reflecting with undergraduates on the challenges of teaching in this modality. According to the beginning professors, students notice the difference between a professor who has worked in basic education and one who has no experience in this teaching modality.

I've had classes where they said that there was a difference between the way I approached a topic and other professors who had never entered a classroom in basic education did it. It's not me saying that, the students said that the approach is different when you bring examples from your own practice. For example, when I worked with the students Emilia Ferreira's perspective on writing hypotheses, I had my own material produced by my students and I brought it and also showed them that the interventions I made to help the child overcome that phase. For a professor who never worked with literacy, never experienced it, it is very difficult to address it, it does not mean it's impossible, because they can always study, carry out observation in a school, but living this experience is different (P21E).

Understanding the human development process and the students' specific needs was highlighted by the participants as essential for teaching in undergraduate programs. The data allow us to infer that the professors participating in the study value specific knowledge combined with pedagogical knowledge, with an emphasis on theoretical knowledge and the appreciation of practical knowledge through experience in basic education.

The *experience as a professor in undergraduate teaching courses* was also built up in interaction with students in the teacher education process.

I think like that, I became a professor, we became professors, through the relationship that we establish with our students, only contents, only the knowledge part does not educate you, it might give you some base, but the main factor is the professor-student relationship you build with them, and they build you. It's a relationship of exchange, of shared knowledge and experiences. If you don't have this connection with your students, the challenges are greater (P11E).

The influence of graduates was evidenced not only as transformative of professional practices, but also as influential in various aspects of life, including personal life. Interaction with undergraduates and the teaching experience, particularly in practical activities and teaching experiences, constituted an important tool in the development of professional practice for the beginning professors in our study.

Final considerations

Analyzing the development of beginning professors' professional practice involves understanding the meanings ascribed to being a teacher. Our findings indicate that, for the

participating teachers, *being a beginning teacher educator* involves multiple responsibilities, both for the education and for the future teacher's performance. However, we found that beginning professors undertake these responsibilities as individual responsibilities. The feeling of responsibility for the education of undergraduates and insecurity regarding such education permeated the beginning of teaching for beginning professors. Part of this sense of responsibility stems from the recognition of the influence that educators have on students.

The research findings highlighted how the university context constituted the locus for constructing professional teaching practice. The university had a dual influence on the construction of the beginning teacher educators' practice: *their experience as undergraduate students and their experience as teacher educators*. We found that the beginning professors drew on the experience gained during their initial training to support their teaching practice. We identified that the knowledge base that most informed their practices came from practical experience as students and teachers. Although they admitted to being influenced by the practices of their educators and colleagues, the beginning professors revealed that, in some respects, they sought to break with the ingrained practices through which they were educated. The comparison of knowledge acquired during their initial education and their experience as higher education professors constituted important tools for constructing the professional practice of the participant professors. We conclude that beginning professors, based on previous experiences, were testing practices, exploring methodological options as a pedagogical strategy, a way of learning to teach in their own teaching practice.

The development of beginning teacher educators' professional practices, while not exclusively shaped by their work contexts or training institutions, is significantly influenced by them. Universities play a key role in the development of professional practices, while beginning teacher educators develop their professional practices through their work contexts. The analysis of beginning teacher educators' professional practices revealed universities as the loci for the development of these professors' professional practices.

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Author Contributions: Author 1 - research conception and design; data construction and processing; data analysis and interpretation; drafting of the final text; Author 2 - research conception and design; collaboration in data processing; data analysis and interpretation; drafting of the final text.

Support or Funding: National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq).

Research Data Availability: The entire dataset supporting the results of this study was made available in the Data Repertory of the State University of Ponta Grossa (UEPG).

Responsible Editor - Associate editors: Márcia de Souza Hobold and Isabel Maria Sabino de Farias; Editor-in-chief: Angela Scalabrin Coutinho.

Reviewer: Clara do Prado Patricio.

How to cite this article:

VOLKMAN, Elizabete; TOZETTO, Susana Soares. The university as a *locus* for the construction of the professional practice of the beginning teacher educator. *Educar em Revista*, Curitiba, v. 41, e97004, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1590/1984-0411.97004>

Received: 09/25/2024

Approved: 06/15/2025

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