

## Taking Care of Teachers: difficulties and cares given to the teachers of public school

Cuidando de Quem Ensina: dificuldades e cuidados destinados aos professores de uma escola pública

Cuidando de Quién Enseña: dificultades y cuidados destinados a los maestros de una escuela pública

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This paper aims to report the experience of the internship in a public school in Uberaba, Minas Gerais, Brazil. The internship intended to contribute to the self-knowledge and health promotion, moreover to promote a better development of teacher's professional activities and improve the educational process. There were eleven meetings during a semester, some with the teachers, other only observing and also some only with the internship personnel. The discussed themes approached the difficulties in working as a teacher, the other "selves" present in the professional lives of the teacher, the dynamic of the classroom, the difficulties of the team and the possibilities of the construction and transformation of the school environment and also the changes in the community. It was possible to work with the ability of the many "selves" that one only person could experience which allowed the participants to talk about themselves, take care of themselves and also see themselves. The internship group has faced many difficulties during the project, but the necessity of keeping the project is very clear.

**Descriptors:** Educational psychology; School health; Burnout professional; Self-concept.

Este artigo tem o objetivo de relatar a experiência de estágio em uma escola pública da cidade de Uberaba/MG, que teve como proposta contribuir para o autoconhecimento, identidade docente e promoção da saúde da equipe, além de promover um melhor desenvolvimento de suas atividades profissionais e melhoria no processo educacional. Foram realizados onze encontros, entre reuniões, grupos com os professores, observações e devolutiva, ao longo de um semestre. Os temas discutidos abordavam as dificuldades do trabalho docente, os outros "eus" presentes na vida dos profissionais, a dinâmica de funcionamento de uma sala de aula, as dificuldades da equipe e a possibilidade de construção e transformação do ambiente escolar e da comunidade. Foi possível trabalhar a capacidade dos vários "Eus" que uma única pessoa pode vivenciar, permitindo aos participantes falarem de si, cuidarem de si e muitas vezes enxergarem a si mesmo. Foram enfrentadas dificuldades, mas ficou clara a necessidade de continuidade do trabalho na escola.

**Descritores:** Psicologia educacional; Saúde escolar; Esgotamento profissional; Autoimagem.

Este artículo tiene como objetivo informar la experiencia de pasantía en una escuela pública en la ciudad de Uberaba, Minas Gerais. Brasil. La propuesta fue contribuir para el autoconocimiento, la identidad docente y promoción de la salud, y además de promover un mejor desarrollo de sus actividades profesionales y la mejora del proceso educativo. Se realizaron once encuentros entre reuniones, grupos con los maestros, observaciones y sesión de retroalimentación a lo largo del semestre. Los temas tratados abordaron las dificultades de la enseñanza, los otros "yo" en la vida actual de los profesionales, la dinámica de funcionamiento de un salón de clases, las dificultades del equipo y la capacidad de construir y transformar el ambiente de la escuela y la comunidad. Fue posible trabajar la capacidad de los diferentes "yos" que una sola persona puede experimentar, permitiendo a los participantes hablaren de sí mismos, cuidar de sí mismos y, a veces mirarse a sí mismos. Se encontraron dificultades, pero había una clara necesidad de continuar el trabajo en la escuela.

**Descriptores:** Psicología educacional; Salud escolar; Agotamiento Profesional; Autoimagen.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, teaching work has faced situations of violence, neglect, insecurity and disbelief with regard to education. It can be said that teachers have directed their professional discourse, allowing young people to recognize the true sense of moral values, respect, rights and duties of a citizen. Thus, it is understood that the role of teaching in our days require a greater understanding of the situation of society because it is through experiences that young people come to understand and follow the rules, making a peaceful resolution of conflicts possible<sup>1</sup>.

Thus, the demands that wear, discourage and even compromise the teacher's work are numerous and the focus of care is rarely directed to the teacher's role, the one who is on the front lines and usually suffers the greatest consequences. They have lived with low pay, zero perspective in career improvement, excessive workload, without recognition of its importance, and being exposed to conditions of violence. Thus, it is known that fear and emotional exhaustion result in lack of commitment and indifference to the activities that should be fulfilled, reigning in a poor quality education<sup>2</sup>.

The psychology professional, then, joined the school setting so that together with all the staff, could understand, discuss, judge and make hypotheses about difficulties of the institutional order of education. The psychologist work in the school context is justified mainly on the assumption that, in the practice of teaching activity, several psychosocial stressors factors, some related to the nature of the function, others related to institutional and social context, influence the lives of teachers and can lead to illnesses<sup>3</sup>.

"The specificity of what is called School Psychology compared to other areas or branches of psychology, as they are constituted today, is given by the conjunction of two elements: firstly, by its objective, this being the contribution to

optimization of educational processes that take place in the school, broadly understood and also complicated by multiple factors involved in them (not only educational factors, but also subjective, relational and organizational ones); and, secondly, the locus of action constituted by different instances of the education system, especially the school"<sup>4</sup>.

The agreement entered into between psychology and education in Brazil is established through the possible changes that the school context is subject. The conscious participation of psychologists in promoting effective transformations demands, besides professional commitment, an active and mainly creative participation in order to organize strategies and empower the work to be performed at the institution<sup>5</sup>.

Whereas the work of the psychologist in the school context is multiple, in other words, various theoretical approaches can support actions in this environment, it can be said that a better articulation of specific knowledge and processes of the profession is advantageous, so there is a positive link regarding the relationships between learning and development in this context<sup>6</sup>.

That said, it is clear that school psychologists need to create a space in the institution to listen to the demands and reflect ways of dealing with everyday situations, developing ways of reflection with the subjects, in order to work relations and paradigms<sup>7</sup>. The professional's principal tasks: "apply psychological knowledge in school, regarding the teaching-learning process, using psycho-pedagogical analyzes and interventions; relating to human development, interpersonal relations and family-community-school integration, to promote the integral development of the being; analyze the relationships between the various segments of the education system and its impact on the teaching process to assist in developing educational procedures able to meet individual needs; provide direct and indirect services to educational agents, as an autonomous professional, directing administrative and educational support

programs; conduct studies and analyze the physical, material, social and cultural man-environment relationships, as the teaching-learning process and educational productivity; develop programs aimed at quality of life and essential care to academic activities; implement programs to develop basic skills for knowledge acquisition and human development"<sup>8</sup>.

The need for school psychologists in schools, working with teachers, is evidenced by some factors related to worker's health. This worker is currently experiencing moments of stress that, initially, in Brazil, seems to be associated with low wages; precarious working conditions; to stressful bureaucratic assignments; high number of students per classroom; unpreparedness of the teacher in front of new situations and emergencies of the time; the pressure exerted by students' parents and society in general; violence instituted in schools; among other elements<sup>9</sup>.

Illness of teachers who face stressful routines is increasing, promoting, in addition to physical illness, mental illness, making it even more crucial the psychologists' work in schools. "Whereas all the work consists of loads, the teacher's work also has: physical loads - demands that have external materiality and that change in the interaction with the body (environmental interaction); and mental burden - psychological dispositions that acquire materiality in body and express themselves through him (emotional reactions) that directly and indirectly influence health and lives of teachers. For understanding the problem of changes in the relationship between work and health of those who work, it becomes important to know how the work is organized"<sup>10</sup>.

Thus, it is believed that in addition to all the activity already proposed to the school psychologist, its function also includes promotion and prevention of mental health of employees and especially the teaching framework of the institution. Promotion and prevention are linked to the contribution of possible personal and institutional reformulations to members of

the school context. In other words, they work together to arouse transformations and provide significant changes in their development. Thus, the psychologist works in order to stimulate growth and professional quality on the conceptions of assessment, learning, and especially of human development<sup>6</sup>.

Therefore, it can be said that the work done in the institution and reported in this paper is justified in two ways. At first by the inclusion of psychology student in school practice and the possibility of learning from this experience, as well as theoretical discussions on the topic. But, above all, its importance lies in the possibility of identifying with the educators from formal and non-formal education system, the main issues related to their experience as professionals, and implement with them a listening work and psycho-social-educational intervention to contribute to the self, teacher identity and health promotion of the team, promoting better development of their professional activities and improvement in the educational process. Thus, this article aims to report the experience of internship in a public school in the city of Uberaba, Minas Gerais, Brazil.

## METHOD

This is an experience report from an experience performed in the internship of discipline "Supervised Internship in Public Health and Education I", of the Psychology course at the Federal University of Triangulo Mineiro - UFTM. The stage was performed in a state school in the city of Uberaba, during the first semester of 2013, after an official report to the institution director, in order to reestablish the proposed activity that had been exercised before.

After this contact, the first meeting with the teaching staff was possible, seeking to clarify how and when the meetings would take place. The proposal was focused on the teaching staff and the difficulties faced in the school context in everyday life. The invitation was extended to all employees; however the involvement did not match the expected.

Initially, the proposal was to work in total of six months of activity, and the meetings would take place in a private room of the institution. Each meeting would last an hour and a half of activities, previously structured according to the previous meeting. Thus, only the first date was determined. Instruments and proposals would arise according to the demands.

For conducting meetings, topics which educators feel the need to talk and discuss were raised among them, such as relaxation time, personal distress, and self to talk about themselves, future expectations and daily difficulties.

The internship was in a state school in Uberaba- MG that serves students ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The More Education Program, of Federal Government, was implemented at the school. This program was established by Ministerial Ordinance 17/2007 and by Presidential Decree 7083/2010 and integrates the actions of the Education Development Plan - EDP, as Federal Government strategy to induce the expansion of the school day and the curriculum organization, on the perspective of implementing integral education. It is an effort to build intersectoral action between the educational and social public policies, thus contributing both to reduce educational inequalities, and for the appreciation of the Brazilian cultural diversity.

This strategy promotes the extension of time, space, educational opportunities and sharing the task of educating among education and other areas professionals, families and different social actors, under the school coordination with their managers, teachers, students and staff. This is justified because the Integral Education, associated with the schooling process, presupposes education connected to life and to the universe of interests and possibilities of children, adolescents and young people<sup>11</sup>.

Thus, in one shift these children comply the class hours corresponding with their age; and in the other shift, perform extracurricular activities, such as the ones offered in this school: tutoring, reading and other activities.

The school has a large space with several rooms divided into two blocks. The activities of More Education Program happen in one of the blocks and the regular activities happen in another block. There are two sports courts, some kiosks for board games, a kitchen and a dining room, an office, a teachers' room, resource room (where there is a psychological counselor who works with children who have diagnosed learning disability).

## RESULTS

According to the proposal and given the difficulties encountered in the effectuation of the group, of eleven meetings total, only four were performed with the group of teachers throughout the semester. The composition of the group varied in every encounter, and only seven women had remained frequent. It was suggested that educators, on first encounter raised issues that could be worked on the following dates.

Among the proposed subjects were: requests for relaxation, personal distress, self and moments to talk about themselves. It was noticed that applications related to the anguish of school life were frequent. As the meetings progressed, it was noted that often the members of the group were stressed and fully experienced the role of teacher, a fact that led to the decision to exploit these biases, interspersing it with requests from teachers. Seven employees that made part of the team, four trainees and the teacher responsible for the UFTM internship were present.

In addition to these group meetings, there were three meetings with the teaching staff. An observation at a classroom was performed, as a request of the participants of one of the groups. A visit to the school's space was conducted; as well as a participation in a lecture which involved an end of semester celebration and a Cultural Gymkhana. And finally, there was a feedback session for the closure of the school activities, thus totaling 11 meetings.

As the composition of the group changed, the manner of conducting and engagement varied. Some meetings

symbolized deep moments of introspection and self-reflection, allowing an intense sensitivity among those present.

The first contact was configured as establishing linkages and contracts relating to the proposed activity. The importance of psychologists in educational institutions and mutual contribution at work was emphasized. Still, days and times of meetings were pre-settled according to the school calendar.

The next meeting teachers solved administrative issues. Thus, it was impossible to conduct any of the activities developed. Attending the supervisor's invitation, it was spoken up again about the internship proposal, in an attempt to encourage teachers to think about how to build a group to strive for similar goals for improvement and mutual exchanges of experiences.

The next group came in just half an hour in an attempt not to lose interest and dedication that were being built. It was established the direction of the group and what everybody would offer and would ask for the group happen so everyone felt comfortable, setting an important meeting exchange. It was heard about stress, frustration, helplessness and fear they face in the activity of teaching, the need for solidarity among people, the ability to maintain a balance in life, the desire to be happy again as a teacher, the faith in Jesus and about how the school, even with its barriers and difficulties, still was their remedy.

Talking with the director, she raised questions concerning school difficulties, about the professional conduct of teachers and especially about what can be done, so that improvements can occur at school. Also highlighted some of the most difficult points of the school: communication with teachers and children.

In the following week took place the second day of activities with the group of teachers. Thinking about welcoming those teachers who had not yet come to the meetings there was a reception for them and the proposal of creation of the group was

again resumed. It was asked again that issues for future meetings were set. The topics suggested were: solution for personal anguish; indiscipline (of students); motivation (for teachers); listening/hearing; students testing teachers (defying them); and relaxation. Some teachers also suggested activities to perform (dynamics); and said that the fact of listening and talking are already unique and therapeutic moments.

It was discussed also about the difficulties they witness as teachers. They said the students have needs that exceed the difficulties of learning and suggested that a visit occurred at school in class schedule and an observation was done in the classroom. From this conversation, a communication activity took place, which highlighted the need and ways to communicate, as many expressed surprise by a specific account of a fellow professional. A dynamic was performed aiming to reestablish different forms of communication, in order to pass the same message in different ways. After this activity, they expressed to have learned the possibility of communicating in other ways, and each one in the group was asked to speak one word to describe the group at the time. The words quoted were: hope, team balance, motivation, strength and others.

In another time, different to what the meetings happened it was executed the observation proposed by the teachers in the group so some facts became more concrete in the following discussions. The observation took place on the following Monday, in the fourth grade classroom attending the afternoon shift. After much uproar, and teacher's questions about the homework, children quieted and sat down, but not for long. Despite teachers' complaints in the group, no difficulty was seen as worrying, only much dispute between them. The class as a whole, presented a very curious and outgoing way, and especially with the proper development.

In the third meeting with the group of teachers it was discussed the observation of the fourth year room and realized the flexibility required of the teacher during class. It was punctuated that students

require much attention from teachers and for the group to perform educational activities, this request for attention should be fully attended by the teacher.

It was discussed about the perception that teachers get so involved with the work that sometimes they forgot the other "selves" that involved their existence. Teachers confirmed that often, forgot their own; and told that they missed a place in the school where they could talk to other employees and consequently rest.

Thinking of the scores made and mostly about the feeling of devaluation that teachers reported, a dynamic was proposed in order to facilitate team integration and the perception of qualities noted by colleagues. Some teachers touched up. The team was united and knit, and involving and experiencing the moment. The realization of the dynamic was a time of great relaxation for teachers. At the end of the dynamic, conversations were focused on the need to be actors of their own lives; and also on how group was being strengthened. The teachers were satisfied with the work done.

The next meeting took place on a different day than usual; everybody was invited to attend a lecture of the Superintendence of Education. The need to stimulate and motivate the team was a clear. It was recognized that the lecture offered brought encouragement and a different relaxation to the group. Then they performed a celebration previously arranged, concluding the activities of that semester.

At the next meeting, on the subsequent semester, the module involving all school teachers happened. As agreed before starting the vacation, this module would give continuity to the group with the teachers. However, the time scheduled for the module was structured by school coordination to discuss relevant issues. The coordination asked the time to discuss these issues, and was accepted. The Psychology students were, then, invited to attend the meeting.

The following week, the teachers were involved in organizing a historical

gymkhana at the school. This had left the school environment a little excited, but happy, communicative and cozy, more than usual. The topic of the meeting was the gymkhana, teams division, activities and workshops that would be offered on the day of the event.

Also in this meeting, the time allowed to the activities was used to discuss what the teachers thought about the days they spent away from school. It was difficult to coordinate the activity, since they talked about various topics at the same time. The initial question was: "How was to spend 15 days away from the school?". Many answers were heard: many teachers said it was very good; some said they wanted to come back soon, because in the school they stayed mentally busy, and they didn't like having no money or nothing to do; another teacher said she enjoyed time with her children. At this point, the director said she went to the school on the vacation time, and that the school without the kids was too sad.

Another topic raised was concerning the positive aspects of being away from school. Issues related to rest, family life, leisure, loving relationships, fun and no need to comply with schedules, and others emerged.

When asked about the positive aspects of being back to school, aspects related to coffee, which was now happening every late afternoon, were mentioned. It was said that the teachers were coming back with more energy and with more unity. One teacher pointed out that she missed the team atmosphere that had been formed and that, since she lived alone, she was really missing the teachers that were now part of her routine. They understood that this greater union was a result of the activities developed during the meetings.

Building on the theme that was discussed, an activity was proposed with themes about team, group, and what is desired for the neighbor. They were asked to write on a piece of paper something that they wanted to team mate fulfilled. Then the papers with the names of each person were gathered up. After that, they were informed

that each one would fulfill their own desire. This way, they got a dose of their own medicine.

Regarding the last meeting, all programming for closing the meetings had to be changed. On the appointed day for the last meeting, the director needed to meet the team urgently and it was not possible to perform what was planned. However, a few minutes were granted to clarify some aspects that were visible during the activities.

It was stressed the importance of teamwork; thanked the kindness felt in every meeting. Emphasis was also given on how the team was constituted face the difficulties and that despite differences and disagreements, it is possible to build, encourage and support the growth and development of every child and teenager in the school. Furthermore, it was stressed the importance of the school coordinating to comply with the proposed activities, due to the difficulty experienced with the markings of meetings at times that were stipulated by the directorship to carry out the group meetings.

## DISCUSSION

There is no certainty about the exact number of participants in every meeting, since many teachers did not stay until the end, others arrived late and seeing that it was an open group, the quantity was what mattered least. Every moment of the activities brought a different context, with different emotions and speech; however, an important group was characterized, with many exchanges, lived intensely in a special and unique way for each one in the group.

Because it was the continuation of a Psychology course internship, there was no resistance from the school director to continue to work with other interns. But, during the execution of the same, several moments with the teachers were harmed or lost due to specific actions of the directorship because of the school's needs. Teachers showed interest during the meetings, which took a great experience for everyone, because each group learned with

the participants, either it was personal or professional learning.

In the work conducted with the groups, it was evident that those meetings sought an improvement of the group participants. Emphasis was given to the fact that teachers are not teachers all the time and that the work of psychologists in school was related also to their personal issues that influence the occupational practice and the quality of life and highlighting what authors like Pigatto<sup>1</sup> describe about attention to focus on the teacher, once they are the ones who "stands up" to the difficulties encountered in school today.

It is important to create environments for analysis of practice, sharing of contributions and reflection on how to think, decide, react and communicate in the classroom; create environments for professionals to work on themselves, their fears and emotions, in which it is encouraged the development of the person and their identity<sup>12</sup>.

As portrayed by Pigatto<sup>1</sup>, teachers reported moments of insecurity, violence and neglect during their teaching activities, feelings experienced either by contact with students, or the community in which they live or questions related to the teacher. However, we emphasize the need for understanding the community and the manners in which students are placed, avoiding culpability of children who often seek teachers as key mediators of internal and external conflicts they experience, making the educator a social actor in the community, and showing how reality is close to the eyes, which may be evidenced in state school which the internship was conducted.

The paradigm that psychologists always perform diagnoses was often emphasized by teachers. Accordingly, they sought and asked for measures to be taken with "student-problems", even with the explanations of possibility of other conversations and the non-existence of a "magic recipe". Reaffirming the vision and posture indicated by Andrada<sup>7</sup>, in which the perspective of the school psychologist acting

was often work with problematic students and disregarding social issues.

Sivieri-Pereira<sup>13</sup> points out that studies of the "function" of the teacher in the educational process, show that teachers have been placed in the background for a long time, both as regards the production of systematic knowledge about the practice itself, and as characters of educational dynamics. It was aimed to establish the best method of education, regardless of the teacher's participation in any process instance.

Nóvoa<sup>14</sup>, claims that "the identity crisis of teachers, the subject of numerous debates over the past 20 years, is no stranger to this evolution that has been imposing a separation between the personal self and the professional self." This contributed greatly to the process of de-professionalization of teachers.

The results of this work with teachers shows that the events described, as supposedly historical, are present today, on the day-to-day teaching practice hindering the efficient development of the educational process. Groups as proposed by this paper seek to minimize the distance between the personal and the professional dimensions of teaching career.

## CONCLUSION

Since this was a work that continued the previous internship and investigated and created the opening for the performance of interns in this institution, efforts were made to increase the involvement of teachers, trying to engage them with the possibility of self-care even in their work environment.

Keeping in mind the objectives of the internship, it was possible to work the ability of the various "selves" that a single person can experience and that all these selves compose the formation of a Self-identity, allowing group members to talk about themselves, care for themselves and often see themselves in a different manner.

The group was always willing and interacting with each other, both in moments of discussion of relevant issues of school administration as in the meeting moments.

In many occasions, it was noticed that the fact that teachers expose feelings and problems was already considered therapeutic for some of them.

Some points that can guide and give continuity to the group of teachers developed in the internship period are suggested: lead the group firmly, not allowing to be carried away by the dispersions caused by issues unrelated to the proposed activities; use of activities aimed at reflection and discussion, since the school does not allow time for dialogue between them; use of dynamics with reasoning that cause relaxation and at the same time insight and exchange; use of music, images, impact phrases because they speed the reasoning and enable sensitivity to the group. Activities that work the body are also important, but should be more focused on relaxation and self, without member's exposure and avoid the use of methods that require writing and testing.

The difficulties encountered on the staff corresponded to natural everyday wear that each one faced and, thus, the group often did not understand the true focus of the discussions. Many meetings have become moment of relaxation or even rest. Topics which were not on the agenda were discussed and solutions, which also did not fit the moment, were decided. However, despite all this issues did not belong to time, belonged in some way to what the internship proposed. These professionals were able to transform this group according to the need that was present, making it a special moment, lived with intensity, emotion, and that in the end was a common place that made a difference individually in their lives.

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#### CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors participated in all stages of confection of the article.