Professionalism and teacher education: social representations of teachers

Profissionalidade e formação docente: representações sociais de professores

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Abstract

This study examines the social representation of teacher training of teachers in public schools in Pernambuco State. We assume that the social representations can contribute to trigger educational practices and provide access to their knowledge. Questionnaires were used with 80 teachers from 20 schools in primary and secondary education. We

identify the semantic field of social representations of teachers and the elements that constitute the core. The results revealed that the representations about the formation circulate around the educational, academic and professional categories. The professional category was insignificant in the field of representations of the subjects investigated. The core of these representations is organized around the academic dimension. The representations of the training are based on academic category, which indicates the strong influence of initial training in undergraduate programs, although there was substantiated evidence of changes in emphasis in the teaching category found in the representations of teachers.

Keywords: Teacher professionalism. Social representations. Teaching practice.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a representação social sobre a formação docente de professores da rede pública estadual de Pernambuco. Partimos do pressuposto de que as representações sociais podem contribuir para desencadear práticas educativas e possibilitar o acesso a seu conhecimento. Foram aplicados questionários de associação livre e associação dirigida a 80 professores de 20 escolas de ensinos Fundamental e Médio. Identificamos o campo semântico das representações sociais dos professores e os elementos que constituíam o núcleo central. Os resultados revelaram que as representações sobre a formação circulam em torno das categorias pedagógica, acadêmica e profissional. A categoria profissional foi insignificante no campo das representações dos sujeitos investigados. O núcleo central dessas representações se organiza em torno da dimensão acadêmica. As representações da formação são ancoradas na categoria acadêmica indicando a forte influência da formação inicial em cursos de licenciatura, apesar de terem sido encontrados indícios de mudanças consubstanciadas na ênfase na categoria pedagógica encontrada nas representações dos professores.

Palavras-chave*: Profissionalidade docente. Representações sociais. Prática docente.*

Introduction

The material developed in the Educational area has been fomenting the discussion about teacher education and the belief that the knowledge basis — understood here as a body of comprehension, knowledge, abilities and dispositions required for the enactment of a teacher in a given situation (SHULMAN, 1986) — would allow us to structure teacher education and directly instruct the practical formation. This way, researches with the intent of improving teacher education were developed alongside with a professionalization process favorable to the legitimization of the profession and transposition of the docent conception connected to the vocation.

Going forward, in the 80's, in USA and Canada, studies about docent knowledge were initiated. Shulman (1986), Gaunthier (1998), Tardif (2000, 2002) based their studies in the premise of an existing "knowledge basis" to teaching. They investigated and systematized these knowledge, looking to comprehend the genealogy of the docent activity and validation of a *corpus* of knowledge mobilized by the teacher.

In the national scenario, Pimenta (2000, p. 17) highlights the importance of "a re-signification of the formative process through the reconsideration of the necessary knowledge to the docents, putting the pedagogical and docent practice as analysis object". Many studies (BRZEZINSKI, 1996; CUNHA, 1994; GATTI, 1997; LIBÂNEO, 1998) have pointed out the danger of bailing out and fast forwarding graduations that occurs in graduation courses, asides from other ills. However, the indispensable element to teaching — the teacher —, according to discussions in the educational area, is not getting the adequate formation.

In Brazil, the academic formation process of the teacher also has been one of the major themes in researches, but more related to the formation and professional development. According to Ferreira (2003), only in the late years of the 90's, a transformation of the research paradigm

has been initiated, in other words, the teacher thinking will slowly take space in the research field of their own formation.

Even though a change in the speech has occurred, it is perceived, in the teacher education, the continuity of an obsolete practice centered in the traditional model, with the predominance of a dichotomy between theory and practice. In reality, we still know very little about how to transform the speeches in effective practices.

However, when we look what has been told and published and the reality of classrooms, we can infer that the perceived change occurs in the field of the speech. Nowadays, almost everyone talks about teachers as reflexive professionals, investigators of their own practice, producer of knowledge, key-element of curricular innovations in schools and major responsible in his own professional development, however, the concordance and clearance about the significance of these terms it's not very unanimous.

In the specific case of this study, our major preoccupation was analyzing the education of the teachers that already act in basic education, with the intent of comprehend how these subjects represent the education. For this, we understand as necessary a focus that involves others theories, trying to explaining it and analyzing it. This way, we elected, in our study, as research subject, the social representatives of teacher education in the public education network of the state of Pernambuco.

We used the Theory of Social Representation developed by Moscovici (1978) and other authors in the field, such as Denise Jodelet (1989), Jean Claude Abric (1994) and other, because the social representation can contribute in the triggering of educative practices and make it possible the access to its knowledge.

Based on what has been exposed so far, the intent, in this study, is to comprehend the initial educational process of public schools teachers, using the analysis of social representatives about education. To do so, it is taken, as analysis references, initial educational process and the Theory of Social Representation as theoretical and methodological leverage. Such theoretical basis served us as support, because we comprehend

that the subject is constructive and not predetermined, in other words, elaborates, reelaborates and alters the significance of the things which he/she interacts in the social field.

This study found itself structured in the following way: first it will be introduced the theoretical basis; the teacher educational process and the Theory of Social Representation, emphasizing the studies developed in these areas, while the second part will cover the description of the methodology, gathering and analysis of data and the presentation and discussion about the results, finishing with the final considerations.

The docent educational proccess and the Theorie of Social Representation

Since the creation of graduation courses in Brazil, in the old Philosophy universities, in the 30's, to nowadays, the formation of teachers has been revealing mismatches and dilemma. The more recent problems are: dichotomy between specific disciplines and pedagogical disciplines and between baccalaureate and licensure; disarticulation between academic formation and practical reality.

These dichotomies and disarticulations have become the study and discussion object, especially, starting from the 80's, when a movement of reorganization of Brazilian civil society was initiated, after a long period of military dictatorship. Since then, the problems experienced by licensure are becoming amply divulged in the available literature, debates promoted by entities and events, such as licensures forums promoted by universities.

Alves (1998), the professional formation is not exclusively made in graduation courses, but in multiple spheres, such as theoretical knowledge, practical-political, epistemological, pedagogical, curricular, didactic and other means necessary to the docent exercise. In this point of view, the study of social representation about the docent formation

makes it possible the approximation of the defined object, considering it in the dynamism that creates it.

The social representation, according to the authors in the field, constitutes a specific knowledge: the common sense, the practical knowledge that orientates the individual conduct and their communication. Alloufa and Madeira (1990), consider the common sense as a synthesis constructed in the subject-object relationship in a determined space and time. This way, to be build up as a knowledge, the representatives can't exist isolated; they suppose an articulation in the logic that guides the subject as it situates itself, acts and interacts with in a day-to-day basis. To Jodelet (1989, p.41, translated by the author):

> Social representation must be studied articulating affective elements, mental and social, integrating alongside a cognition, of language and communication, the consideration of social relations that affect the social representations and the material reality, social and ideal that they're going to intervene with.

In this covering, the comprehension is a social subject. The representations, which are ways of thinking shared by different groups, mediate the interaction of the social subjects with the reality, with the objects and social facts that compose it. In the same line of thought, the social representation refer themselves to something and are constructed by someone, in other words, there is a direct connection between the subject and object in which their symbolization and interpretation gives their meaning. Therefore, at the same time, we have the subject construction and attitude, the articulation that integrates the epistemic subject to the psychological subject. So, knowing about the social representation and teacher education in the state public school network can amplify the discussion space about the initial formation of this kind of professional.

Arising from this comprehension we find it as a relevant the contribution given by the Theory of Social Representation to this

investigation, since it will allow the identification of the attributed meanings to the education of teachers, and, at the same time, point out constitutive of the representation correlated to the space occupied by the teacher and, still, with equal intensity, proportionate reflection to the educational politics that guide this formation.

Madeira (2000), says that the meaning of a social representation can't be captured if we isolate the dynamic in which it will be configured, crystalizing it. Such meaning can't run out in the linearity of the data, but delineating itself in the imbrications, contradictions and conflicts imposed by the experienced reality. This dialectic makes the social representation an announcer of the existing meaning and, at the same time, pre-announcer of the possible space in which will transform itself.

This way, considering that, according to Dotta (2006), the social representation of teachers is constructed based in the practical appropriation, of its relations and the historical and social knowledge, to study them makes it possible to organize and amplify the educational knowledge, in special when it comes to the construction of their identity, producing subsidies to understand their professional necessities, especially when it comes to the reference of their initial formation.

Being the social representation determinant in the identity construction and influenced by the way knowledge is distributed in a given reality, it is important, to comprehend it, the analysis of the context where it was generated. In the present case, the initial process of teacher education of the teachers that work in public schools for Pernambuco.

The Theory of Social Representation

In this topic, we will present a brief analysis about the Theory of Social Representation that was first observed by Moscovici in 1961, because we understand that it constitutes a theoretical-methodological

resource strongly recommendable to treat our study subject. According to Dotta (2006, p. 41), the "Theory of Social Representations constitute itself in a theoretical-methodological referential, for it is treated as a theory that brings in its bulge a method".

The word representation, which comes with many meanings, is a classic term of Philosophy and Psychology. However, it was with Moscovici's (1978) work *The Social Representation of Psychoanalyze* that the term began to be used with more emphasis. This work look after a way of explaining if the ways of knowledge generated by a determined social group are appropriated, reconstructed by other groups; he introduced, this way, the notion of social representation.

In his work, Moscovici adds to the scene the knowledge of common sense, that, so far, was considered less important when relating to the sense elaborated inside the science patterns. Due to this fact, a way of demonstrating the permanent relation between what science produces and the return to social context — when the subjects appropriate, recreate and utilize the knowledge originated from science in their everyday — and conceived the social representation as an instrument that values the knowledge and the common sense experiences.

Moscovici, while bringing the knowing and doing from the common sense to the center of the arena, makes it evident that such knowledge also is part of history, change ways, builds culture, amplify horizons, sustain and provides material condition, even to the privileged groups that appropriate science. In this line of thought, the social representation does not base itself in a individualistic conception; au contraire, points out to the social construction of subjects in a determined society, namely, the individuals think, act, elaborate concepts, definitions, realize social practices collectively.

Nowadays, the study of the aforementioned theory is in plain expansion in Brazil: the areas that joined this referential, including education, health and social service, as well as the research works, have been amplified. It can be stated that such growth occurs due to the fact

that the studies in social representation have been demonstrating how much this notion and its correlated theoretical basis allow the deep comprehension and explanation of social phenomena.

The social representation does not base itself in a individualistic conception; au contraire, points out to the social construction of subjects in a determined society, namely, the individuals think, act, elaborate concepts, definitions, realize social practices collectively. It is not about simple mechanisms, copies of individual impressions, but the result of the interaction between men and society, in constant reinvention of situations, conflicts and proposals. Indeed, the social environment is the one that mediates the being and the object.

According to Moscovici (1978), the definition of social representations, a way of social knowledge, it is, then, divided in three important aspects: communication, reconstruction of the reality and domination of the world. Communication, because the representation offer people a code to their trades and to nominate and rate the parts of their world, their history. Reconstruction of reality, because it is in the constant and dynamic communication-representation that the subjects reconstruct their everyday reality. The social representations act as guides to interpret and organize reality, providing the elements with the intent that the subjects take positions when they face reality and define the nature of their own actions against it. The representations participate in the construction of the reality, which only exists while such interactions of individuals and groups with social objects occur.

According do Sá (1996), the alluded theory unfolds in three chains of knowledge: one is more loyal to the original theory and has Jodelet as a representative in Paris; another one seeks do articulate the ulterior one with a more sociological perspective that is led by Doise, in Geneva; and, finally, the third chain emphasizes the cognitive-structural dimension of representations and is led by Abric, in Aix-en-Provence.

This study uses as theoretical contribution the Theory os Social Representations, as well as a structural approach led by Abric (1994).

Methodological perspective

The theory of social representations developed by Moscovici presents itself as a theoretical feature strongly recommended for the treatment of this object by providing a multidisciplinary and multifaceted approach to a phenomenon which is situated in the lathing of social and psychological aspects that involve both cognitive and affective dimension of the subject.

For being a broad theory is not recommended a single methodological procedure to cover all information involving an object of social representations, which may then be used multiple research methods to characterize the type of object to be searched, and subsequently select consistent methods aiming at the best way to raise and analyze the data.

In this study, we used two data collection instruments: the questionnaire of free association (ABRIC, 1994) and directed the association (SILVA, 2008).

First we used the questionnaire of free association, composed of two parts. The first contained questions that allowed the construction of the profile of the subjects, and the second with inducing expression. This technique has the objective of identifying the semantic field of representations, so that we can identify the latent elements. For this, the subject is asked to produce words from an inductive term, phrases or expressions that come to mind. Here the differential nature of this technique, it gives the subject a more inductive spontaneous character, allowing it to efficiently access the elements of the semantic field of the studied object. In the study proposed the term was inducing the expression *training*.

According Abric (1994), a methodological procedure that allows to reduce the portion of interpretation or elaboration of the meaning of the researcher is to ask the person who, from the production itself, analyze and compare the data obtained in the first stage of the study — in our case, free association. This procedure, however, makes the analysis of the most relevant results.

Thus, based on associations produced in the questionnaires of free association, we obtained the first clipping of words necessary to perform the directed association. This technique is to ask the subject, through a set of words produced by himself on free association, which select those that are closest to the object under study, without determining the amount of words that should be associated. When a word is selected several times, it enables the removal of the elements associated with the representation that can be its organizers terms (ABRIC, 1994).

The large number of connections, or relations, that a particular element has with other representation has frequently been used as an indication of their likely participation in the core. The survey of these connections is an important tool in studies of social representations, as well as contributes to the systematic empirical production for the development of the theory of core (MOLINER, 1994).

For the survey, we used 80 teachers, 50 of the final years of primary school and 30 high school, 20 schools of public state of Pernambuco. Our first observation regarding the variable "sex", noted the predominance of women (65%) versus 35% male. Qualitative analysis found that high school teachers have a greater number of men, and the disciplines of the humanities is the predominance of women. As for the relationship age and length of service, the sample portrays more teachers with experience more than 10 years of service in Basic Education. Regarding age, nearly half of teachers (43%) are in the age range 35-50 years; only 8% between 25 and 34 years.

Results

We obtained as a result of free association questionnaire, 400 words that were associated with the stimulus word (Training) of which 38 are different; the most frequently mentioned were less than 3 (Table 1).

Table 1 - Associated words to the term *formation* (n = 38)

Associated Words	F	Associated Words	F	Associated Words	F
Didadict	32	Methodology	10	Improvement	5
Discipline	28	Content	10	Update	5
Knowledge	26	Profession	10	Compromise	5
Licensure	22	Competence	9	Information	5
Study	20	Culture	8	Capacitation	5
Learning	20	Know	8	Chalenge	5
Teaching	17	Experience	8	Ethics	5
Education	17	Curriculum	7	Development	3
Planning	16	Identity	7	Future	3
Practice	16	Faculty	7	University	3
Citizenship	12	Responsability	7	Realization	3
Work	12	Progress	6	Sucesso	2
Theory	10	Reflection	6		

Source: Research data.

In order to further analyze the data, we developed, based on the words associated categories that allow us to delineate, in more detail, the semantic field of social representations of teachers on training.

Initially, we select the words that appeared in the most representative; then elaborated the categories according to the nature of the contents seized. Thus, we obtained related to *academic* content, *pedagogical* and *professional* dimensions.

In the *academic* category, one sees the words that are part of initial teacher training process and to intellectual development, such as (bachelor, study, knowledge, theory, information, culture, knowledge, curriculum, and faculty). In the pedagogical category, there are words that express aspects related to the development of pedagogical practice process, among others have (teaching, discipline, teaching, learning, methodology, content, practice, education). And finally, in the professional category, words that express the understanding of professional identity, which,

according to Pimenta (2000), is built based on the social significance of the profession (job, profession, qualification, experience, future , ethics).

The representations of the teachers show a high percentage of the *pedagogical* dimension (44%) and *academic* dimension (33%). The category of *professional* dimension appears only at 23%.

Accordingly, it can be seen in the analysis of representations that teachers elect as important in forming knowledge, both specific content area to be taught as the way they are taught.

Thus, according to the data presented, the fundamental element of teaching in this perspective is the organizational logic of the content to be taught, parts and prerequisites without major concerns with the subjects of learning and the context in which it should happen. These results allow us to affirm that the meaning given to teaching by the teachers was based on instrumental technical rationality as defined by Schön (1992).

According to this author, the instrumental rationality in the pedagogical work is characterized as a rational perspective that assigns the efficiency of educational work to the selection and adoption of techniques based on knowledge produced under the auspices of science positivist inspiration, by using instruments to the achievement of pre-defined purposes (SCHÖN, 1992).

Although one understands the importance of the knowledge of a highly technical nature, we argue, based on what is discussed today (PIMENTA, 2000; SCHÖN, 1992; ZEICHNER, 1993) that they do not cover the breadth of knowledge necessary for the performance professional teacher. We understand that the training is addressing the disciplinary and curricular knowledge; but that also offers grants to teachers for him to become able to understand the contemporary social context and its role in this reality, as well as enable one to criticism and reflective teaching practice.

A worrying fact is that the *professional* category has shown negligible contribution in the field of representations of the subject and not be present in the components of the internal structure of these representations.

This result indicates that the social representations of teachers surveyed showed no relationship with the construction of teacher

identity. According to Pimenta (2000, p.19), "[a] professional identity is constructed, from the social significance of the profession; continual review of the social meanings of the profession; the revision of traditions".

The analysis related to the semantic field of representations follows the organization data of the internal structure of these representations. The data produced by the Association questionnaire directed enabled us to identify and analyze the organization of the internal structure of the representations described by the subjects. This allowed access to the central core of the representation on the education of teachers, based on the observation of the frequency of the words most associated by the subjects and the lifting of words considered most important. According Moliner (1994, p. 208),

> [...] In the study of representation, it appears that certain cognitions, known for his verbal label, appear more frequently than others in the discourse of the subject. This phenomenon of projection, which appears usually associated with the central status of certain cognitions, should not surprise. Precisely, the projection is a consequence of the symbolic value of the central cognitions.

The author emphasizes that for the detection of elements of the core is required, in addition to the projection, checking the power of these associative elements. Noting that guidance, follow the words listed in the association addressed in their respective categories.

Table 2 - Associated words to the expression *formation* (n = 12)

Associated words	F	Associated words	F	Associated words	F
Knowledge	42	Teaching	15	Discpline	9
Learning	23	**Development**	10	*Profession*	7
Study	22	Didactics	10	*Work*	5
Licensure	20	*Responsability*	9	*Compromise*	5

Note: Categories: educational, **academic**, *professional*. F = frequency.

Source: Research data.

Observed in the field of semantic representations of teachers, high percentage of the pedagogical dimension (44%) and the academic dimension (33%). However the internal structure is observed that the academic dimension begins to dominate with 53%, 33% with pedagogical and professional with 14%, below the semantic field percentage.

Whereas the formation of representations is anchored in the academic category, one can assign a strong influence this process linked to the initial training, offered in undergraduate courses. Based on this observation, we stress the importance of teacher training courses offer students the opportunity to learn different knowledge in order to be able to perform its task in the best possible way because "teaching implies learning to teach, or learn to gradually master the knowledge needed to carry out the work of teaching" (TARDIF, 2002, p. 20).

We must also point out that no one becomes a teacher from day to night; the process is long and complex: it begins in the experiences of the initial training course and through the various experiences built from knowledge of different knowledge (disciplinary, curricular, pedagogical tradition, experiential), which translates into pedagogical practice, characteristic of teaching profession.

On the issue of professional dimension, another challenge for initial training courses is to assist in the movement of the student to see yourself as a teacher process, i.e., help they build their identity as a teacher. Therefore, it is essential that the training course for teachers, in a vocational dimension is also contemplated. However, our data indicate that the professional category as that which appears in less semantic representations in the study of social fields.

Given these results, we can infer that the representations of the group of teachers are anchored on the basic premise that, to form the teacher is required to teach a body of knowledge established and legitimized by science and culture, especially the intrinsic value they represent. Viewed from this angle, the most important aspect of teaching back to the selection and organization of content to be taught, highlighting its elements are parts and prerequisites. Thus, knowledge,

taken as a pure reflection of objects is organized without the mediation of the subject.

In the same direction, the characteristics of teachers' work are also tax that organizational logic and neutrality: security, transmission characterized by the methodology of demonstration, only parameters of evaluation.

It is noteworthy that it is not goal of social representations research a homogeneous group to act because identifying the Social Representation of an object in a certain group is not to say that everyone in that group will act with the same conduct or formulate the same thoughts, because individuals bring with particular life experiences and specific inserts in society.

Final considerations

Understanding knowledge as a dynamic process and that any final product of the analysis of a research assumes the character of incompleteness does not intend to draw definitive conclusions or generalizations, but approaches that support discussions on teacher education. In this sense, we present some considerations about the analysis performed by us throughout this study.

The analysis of the social representation of teacher education from the state system allowed us to understand what underlies this formation process and identify the meanings attributed by the subjects and the integral dimensions of that process.

The results revealed that the representations about the formation circulate around the educational, academic and professional categories, the most frequent category of pedagogical dimension. However, it is observed that the representations of the training are anchored in the academic category, i.e., a strong influence of this process linked to the initial training, offered in undergraduate courses. The professional

category showed a negligible contribution to both the semantic field as the internal structure of the representations of the subjects investigated.

Our data points out that, both the semantic field as the organizational structure of social representations that despite the emergence of the international movement to break with the paradigm of instrumental technical rationality (SCHÖN, 1992), representations of teachers still are based on the design of training it was historically, or constructed on the understanding that training is circumscribed to the acquisition of specific knowledge of the area and how to teach them how

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According to Thompson (1992), the emergence of new curricular guidelines, participation in training activities or reading texts about educational theories can raise good perspectives on teaching practice. However, the trend we observed in teachers is to accommodate the new elements to the existing conceptual structures, modifying them as necessary, so leave those structures basically unchanged. This was also present in our research: many different subjects, on different occasions, claimed training focused on pedagogical aspects when evoked more words associated with that aspect. Based on these findings, we infer that the representation of teacher education is still very much intertwined in the model of "technical rationality" (SCHÖN, 1992).

On the other hand, we understand that overcoming a concept in favor of another, and the introduction of changes are not quick or simple process; on the contrary, demand understanding and maturing of new ideas, detachment from the old models and practices, awareness of the need for change and willingness to change.

Incidentally, Ponte (1992), in a study about processes of change in conceptions of teachers noted that after a period of training of mathematics teachers upgrade program, major changes regarding the use of new methodologies. However, the most central aspects — how to envisage and they are in the profession — there were no significant changes.

Also according Ponte (1992), the difficulties of teachers with reflection can be related to the deeper aspects of their culture: deeply rooted conceptions of what being a teacher. For the same author, these aspects are much harder to change than the mere adoption of new pedagogical orientation.

Changing conceptions and practices is a difficult and painful process for which people offer natural resistance and somewhat healthy (BENAVENTE, 1990). It's hard to change people, especially when they are not engaged in effecting such change.

These difficulties were also in our data. Even evidenced in the semantic field representation with a significant percentage of the pedagogical dimension, teachers surveyed revealed as constituting the core of the social representation of the elements of academic training category.

From this perspective, constitutes a challenge for teacher training courses, organize their curricula to enable future teachers experience desirable learning experiences for their future students, intellectually provocative way, instigating, problematical.

It's up to prospective teachers to develop an attitude of openness to experimentation and innovation. Become really professional as they teach and reflect on their teaching. Therefore, the main objective of training back to the end of enabling the learner preparation and involvement in own professional development. Important to highlight the need to consider the educational knowledge, which includes contributions of science and education enables awareness of educational issues and reflection on them.

The analysis of the social representation of teacher education from the state system allowed us to understand what underlies this

formation process and identify the meanings attributed by the subjects and the integral dimensions of that process.

We hope that this research will contribute to the improvement of teacher training process and, above all, that enables educational institutions to reflect on their teaching practices and pedagogical

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