

GEOGRAPHY TEACHER FORMATION: A PATH TOWARDS COOPERATION

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An educative work conscious of what is and which is the function of the discipline in school is necessary in order to make proposals towards teaching geography in accordance to contemporary social demands. This work needs to be intentioned towards student learning. One of the pillars towards this objective concerns investment in aspects of initial and continuous teaching formation. It is comprehended that teacher formation is a relevant theme for researchers on the education field. In Geography, the preoccupation with formation comes alongside the fact that daily challenges concerning this discipline are posed to a ‘community’ of professionals (basic school teachers, teachers in initial formation and professors) that intend to intervene positively on the intellectual, social and affective development of students, independently of interferences outside of school’s dynamics. Theoretical and practical investments focused on teacher formation are important to face these challenges.

In this paper we present some elements that involve the continuous formation of geography teachers in cooperative groups based on the comprehension that this is a way to qualify their professional development. We highlight the centrality of teaching in times of crisis and its relevant social role towards the formation of students geographical thought. We discuss the potentialities of Communities of Practice (CoP) on teacher formation by presenting two examples of those groups in the field of continuous formation in the

Laboratório de Estudos e Pesquisa em Ensino de Geografia (LEPEG) [Laboratory of Studies and Researches on Geography Teaching] at *Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG)* [Federal University of Goiás]. The paper focuses on the main characteristics, orientational conception of cooperation, and methodological path experimented on both communities.

Our studies are connected to the challenges of teacher formation that can allow the professional to recognize himself as an autonomous intellectual that has authorship of his work and who practices a profession of societal relevance. This understanding orients actions in different moments of initial and continued teacher formation, at which he has the capacity to reflect and problematize his practice, the means to analyze it through theoretical-conceptual fundamentals, and formulate theories and practices to resolve evidenced situations and problems. In this occasion there are general questions frequently posed by teachers, such as:

How can I accomplish my work with the recently implemented Brazilian educational policies?

How can I position myself when facing outside impositions?

What is my autonomy to have authorship in my work?

Which pedagogical-didactical orientations I have to follow: those of educational directors and managers or those of the specialists?

When there are outside interferences that rupture my experience-based workflow, how can I react and/or what can I do?

Towards professors working on teacher formation environments, similar questions frequently asked are:

Should (or is it possible) to reaffirm, in formative practices, principles of teaching autonomy and authorship?

What is teaching autonomy and what are its practical limits? What is the contribution of a consistent theoretical formation to enable this autonomy?

What is the meaning of being an author of teaching work? In what dimensions does teaching authorship manifests?

Facing a more directive educational policy, is it possible or adequate to develop work proposals with a certain degree of teaching autonomy and authorship?

Thus, the proposition of strengthening initial and continued teacher formation remains as an important way to confront different contexts that emerge in the teacher professional life. Some general questions orient our investigative work focused in finding out how to assure a more consistent and qualified formation. Among others, the questions that orient our response to this objective are:

How to educate teachers to face the diverse challenges of their professional reality in different contexts?

How to educate Geography teachers enabling them to have intellectual conditions for the defense of an autonomous and authorial work?

How to provide them with knowledges, convictions and cognitive-operational conditions to professional practice?

What type of knowledge composes teacher's knowledge?

How does the cognitive development of teachers occur? How does he learn to teach and how does he do it?

Have the formative courses of our institutions, in the last decades, been adequate?

What are those courses?

These questions are pertinent to comprehend teachers' formative processes and their professional practice when facing demands that will be posed by educational realities of contexts such as the Brazilian present. These inquiries orient our investigations into finding together – as formative professors, teachers in formation and basic education teachers – safer ways for the professional practices of teaching Geography in a manner that can promote significative learning conditions for students. Our understanding is that teacher's formation has a general character with aspects common to all teachers, but it also has particularities concerning Geography teachers, which pose specific objectives and goals in their formation and, consequently, professional practices.

The concept of professional development (Imbernón, 2010) is important to indicate the importance of teachers' formative capacities because it refers to all systematic action, and how it must be a continuous process with the objective of developing better professional practices, beliefs and knowledges. This conception fundamentes our actions towards the investigation of teaching practices in Geography and its potentialities of enabling student's learning. The collaborative research based on it is the main methodological course of LEPEG's work.

Collaborative research is understood as an ample combination of methodological development for investigation and teaching formation that is oriented on the collaboration of different educational process subjects: basic education teachers, teachers in formation (students of graduate and under-graduate courses) and formative professors (university faculty). We defend the necessity of approximation between universities and schools to create policies and programs aimed at providing better education. The conception of teachers' continuous professional development has reinforced the belief on the formative potency of having groups composed by teachers in different contexts and developmental situations. We comprehend these groups as Communities of Practice.

According to our understanding, a Community of Practice – CoP – refers to the process of collaboration and sharing of knowledge, interests, activities and practices towards producing personal and collective teaching knowledge. It is possible to develop studies and reflections on ways of teaching and learning in a CoP, which can significantly contribute to teachers' continuous professional development.

Acting towards a CoP good development is associated with enabling shared reflection processes and the establishment of a cooperative environment, open dialogue and trust. In this environment, actions are collectively coordinated, planned and negotiated, seeking personal and collective professional development. These are principles that concerned our work, some of which will be described afterwards in this paper. Before that, however, it is important to delineate some characteristics of this type of formative practice in accordance to some of the field's references.

One characteristic of these groups is pointed out by Fiorentini (2010a). The author emphasizes that teacher study and formation permeate dimensions involving dedication to studying how to teach and learn in school. These groups constitute investigative or reflexive communities formed by school teachers, university professors/researchers and future teachers that study, share, discuss and write about school's pedagogical practices in a collaborative environment.

The concept of CoP permeates a dimension of learning as social act, not as an individual one. CoPs, then, have been constituted as alternatives for teacher's professional development and the production of educative practices based on teaching and learning practices investigations.

CoP's constitution allows for the construction of an instance through which teachers think, problematize, act and reflect in collaboration with what they do and with how they direct their teaching processes concerning school's content. As part of a group, each teacher seeks to strengthen his practices in cooperation alongside its partners. The teacher learns and teaches when he reports his experiences and dilemmas to the group, teaching, in this case, also how to make those kinds of reports. According to Fiorentini (2010b), the teacher learns to narrate and organize his ideas as well as how to systematize his experiences, producing new meanings. The teacher also teaches the group to (re) signify knowledges and experiences of other teachers through his narratives.

We can't disregard that, to form a cooperative group that discusses and reflects collectively about its practice, there is the necessity of a series of structural factors that favors material and work conditions – reduced workdays that allows for seeking professional development, classes with less students which enable opportunities for innovative practices, recognition of study groups inside the school as continuous formation practices, better paychecks that enable teachers to afford participation in events, buying

books, and other conditions. These conditions, however, have been negated or diffculted by Brazilian institutions and public policies highly focused on neoliberal models.

Even in this adverse context for continuous and qualified professional development, it is possible to identify groups that resist and seek forms of cooperation and formative development.

Teachers with studious postures and who search for partners able to analyze and discuss their pedagogical practices present high indications that they want to have a more active, continuous and autonomous participation. They frequently put themselves as protagonists of curricular change in school and of their own processes of professional development, indicating study priorities, sharing and reflecting upon their teaching and learning practices concerning curricular components.

Montero (2001) highlights that a preoccupation with the construction of knowledge in education, its transformation into professional knowledge for teachers and, in particular, the revindication of knowledge generated by teachers through their practice have been central questions for didactic investigation in the last decades. The evolution verified in educational research concerning diverse themes, from the interest on teacher's behavior (classroom practices) to their knowledges, beliefs, feelings and emotions when exercising the profession, made those questions priorities. Returning to the exam of relations between the teaching investigation and teacher formation, therefore, is a necessity.

The concept of Communities of Practice's, certainly, is not something new. Nevertheless, only recently these theories have become a study object for researchers of many fields, including Geography Teaching. In recent years, CoPs have constituted a promising space for the development of researches that seek to comprehend formative processes of teachers' and future teachers' groups.

In the Brazilian field of Geography Teaching, we highlight two recent groups in which we participated and that are examples of cooperative proposals made by teachers in continuous formation.

The first group is the *Rede Colaborativa de Ensino de Cidade e Cidadania* (RECCI) [Collaborative Network of City and Citizenship Teaching]. This network is connected to the Project *Desenvolvimento Profissional do Professor de Geografia* [Professional Development of Geography Teachers] – Group of discussion/formation, conducted by UFG's professor Lana da Souza Cavalcanti. It investigates aspects concerning Geography teachers' professional development, focusing on how the construction of professional knowledge and geographical thought fundaments their teaching regarding urban citizenship in the context of Goiás' state.

The second collaborative group is the geopolitics Discussion Group (GD) coordinated by Leovan Alves dos Santos as a methodology of his doctoral research titled "Geography

teacher in high school and curricular orientations: the geopolitics content in recent proposals” in development at UFG’s Graduate Program in Geography. It is a group composed by Geography teachers of Goiás state schools. It focuses on the perspective of thinking classroom practices and its teaching challenges regarding educational proposals concerning geopolitics in the present context of changes in curricular orientation at national and local levels. Therefore, it intends to discuss teachers’ perspectives and possibilities when faced by curricular directives and prescriptions in planning and developing classes.

Teachers professional development is a continuous, systematic and dynamic process that occurs throughout diverse moments of the career. Thus, formation must be ample, consistent and attend the multiple dimensions and references of knowledge: reference sciences, educational sciences, and societal demands. Reflection on teachers’ professional knowledge must also permeate the actions of professors that with roles in teacher formation. Those are pertinent questions for those that have the responsibility to direct systematic formational processes for teachers towards and specific area. It is fundamental that formative professors exercise practices of creative knowledge-making amongst their routines between teaching and research duties in order to be able to favor these distinct reflexive practices in future teachers.

Teachers that participated on the cooperative groups exemplified in this paper got closer due to converging interests on continued formation, their attachments to the educational system, their internalized symbolic mediations, and the necessity of awakening student interest. It is possible to notice that there are elements that permeate teacher motivation and belief in the teaching activity itself.

In its practice, the teacher makes an amalgamation that allows him to deal with the content and its correlate practical activities. In the case of teaching geography, this amalgamation has the objective of developing geographical thought. Therefore, moments of encounter in the cooperative groups have been considered as another possibility of reflection for teachers amongst their peers and, also, as an opportunity to find collective ways to develop this thought in students. In these moments, it is common to have teachers unburden professional problems, but it is also there that they can find rich insights in the colleagues’ narratives and discover possible solutions to these difficulties. At last, it is important to note that the proximity between teachers has allowed these groups to better understand the main challenges of this profession and enabled them to seek changes together.