

THE CHALLENGES WHEN BECOMING A TEACHER: AN ANALYSIS OF THE TEACHER PROFESSIONALITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

OS DESAFIOS AO TORNAR-SE PROFESSOR/A: UMA ANÁLISE DA PROFISSIONALIDADE DOCENTE NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL

LOS RETOS DE SER PROFESOR: ANÁLISIS DE LA PROFESIONALIDAD DOCENTE EN EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL

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ABSTRACT: The text is to discuss, based on research with teachers of Early Childhood Education, the challenges of becoming a teacher, aiming at the teaching professionalism. Thus, this investigation examined sociodemographic factors related to age, employment status, and education. It was carried out with teachers who work in this stage of education, in two Reference Centers for Early Childhood Education (*Centros de Referência em Educação Infantil-CREI*), through semi-structured interviews. It counted with the participation of 20 teachers from the Municipal Public Education Network of João Pessoa - Paraíba. In the analysis of the data obtained, we used content analysis, with the thematic analysis technique. The results showed that the teachers are satisfied with their initial professional formation, and that one of the biggest challenges after graduation is to return to the academy to study and keep active in a process of permanent formation. With the results, it is possible to think about the expansion of vacancies offered in graduate courses in education, as well as the encouragement to graduate students, in the sense of their permanence as professional researchers.

KEYWORDS: Teaching professionalism. Child education. Teaching profession.

RESUMO: O texto consiste em discutir, a partir de uma pesquisa com professores/as da Educação Infantil, os desafios ao tornar-se professor/a, vislumbrando a profissionalidade docente. Assim, essa investigação examinou fatores sociodemográficos relacionados a faixa etária, vínculo empregatício e formação. Foi realizada com as professoras que atuam nessa etapa da educação, em dois Centros de Referência em Educação Infantil-CREI, a partir de entrevista semiestruturada. Contou com a participação de 20 docentes da Rede Pública Municipal de Ensino de João Pessoa - Paraíba. Na análise dos dados obtidos, utilizamos a análise de conteúdo, com a técnica da análise temática. Os resultados evidenciaram que os/as docentes apresentam satisfação com a formação profissional inicial, e que um dos

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maiores desafios após a graduação é retornar à academia para estudar e manter-se ativo num processo de formação permanente. Com os resultados, pode-se pensar na ampliação das vagas ofertadas nos cursos de pós-graduação na área da educação, bem como o incentivo aos estudantes egressos da graduação, no sentido da sua permanência enquanto profissionais pesquisadores/as.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Profissionalidade docente. Educação infantil. Profissão docente.*

RESUMEN: *El texto pretende discutir, a partir de una investigación con profesores de Educación Infantil, los retos para llegar a ser profesor, apuntando a la profesionalidad docente. Así, esta investigación examinó los factores sociodemográficos relacionados con el grupo de edad, el vínculo laboral y la educación. Se realizó con docentes que trabajan en esta etapa educativa, en dos Centros de Referencia de Educación Infantil-CREI, a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas. Contó con la participación de 20 profesores de la Red Municipal de Educación Pública de João Pessoa - Paraíba. En el análisis de los datos obtenidos, se utilizó el análisis de contenido, con la técnica del análisis temático. Los resultados mostraron que los profesores están satisfechos con la formación profesional inicial, y que uno de los mayores retos después de la graduación es volver a la academia para estudiar y permanecer activos en un proceso de formación continua. Con los resultados, se puede pensar en la ampliación de las vacantes ofrecidas en los cursos de postgrado en el área de educación, así como en el estímulo a los estudiantes de postgrado, en el sentido de su permanencia como investigadores profesionales.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *Profesionalidad docente. Educación infantil. Profesión docente.*

Introduction

In contemporary education, the challenges of becoming a teacher to work in Early Childhood Education permeates the constitution of teaching professionalism, in view of the peculiarities of this stage of education. In addition, children from zero to five years of age need a differentiated educational space that really meets their needs in spaces that perceive the child as a “historical subject with rights that, in the interactions, relationships and daily practices that they experience, builds their personal and collective identity” (BRASIL, 2010). On the contrary, when these needs are not met, the child is denied the right to produce culture, based on games, imagination, observation, experimentation, that is, to build meanings about nature and society, in the perspective of meeting the specificities of their global development (psychological, physical, intellectual and social).

This finding requires that the teacher's professional formation be built throughout their life trajectory, with knowledge from knowledge of the world, social and cultural reality, since it needs to be the result of a continuous process that aims to generate changes in conceptions and consequently in educational practices.

Therefore, for a better understanding, this article is divided, in addition to the introductory words that describe the contextualization of the investigation, the problem, the objectives, the methodological processes, the theoretical foundation that clarifies the teaching professionalism of teachers in the context of the first stage of the Basic Education in the Municipal Public Education Network of João Pessoa-Paraíba - RPMEJP-PB, and finally, the final considerations.

In this direction, this research is justified by the need for theoretical deepening that guide our reflections about the challenges of becoming a teacher, from an analysis of teaching professionalism in Early Childhood Education, regarding the realities of formation and its implications in teaching performance with children from 0 to 5 years of age, as well as for the emergency, as teachers, to contribute with education to the discussion on this topic.

In view of the above, this study emerges from some concerns generated throughout the academic and professional trajectory, marked by the classroom for some time, as well as the experience of a teacher educator at (RPMEJP-PB), which accompanies the educational action in the Centers for Education. References in Early Childhood Education - CREIs. The teaching practice began in the 1980s as a teacher of basic education in public and private educational institutions in the State of Paraíba. When working at this stage of education, it was possible to perceive how the teaching performance happens with the different age groups.

The development of the research instigated us to understand the problem present in the universe of this stage of education, in the sense that it could collaborate in the perspective of avoiding the fragility of the teaching profession and contributing to the process of teaching professionalism, as well as raising other questions regarding the challenges of becoming a teacher to work in this educational field. Mainly in the face of this pandemic context generated by the COVID-19 virus, which caused serious changes in the educational system of the countries, as well as the curricular transformations that this stage of education has been going through, added to the fact in which we are crossed by a change in the initial teacher formation course (Pedagogy), which prioritizes technical pedagogy at the expense of scientific knowledge, as stated in the National Common Base for the Initial Formation of Basic Education Teachers - BNC-Formation - RESOLUTION CNE/CP No. 2, OF 20 DECEMBER 2019 (BRASIL, 2019).

During the period of teaching in Early Childhood Education, we observed that most of the teachers had weaknesses in their performance, whether due to lack of adequate formation or gaps left in their initial formation. Another issue is related to the specificity of the educational work with children from 0 to 5 years of age, in which the pedagogical practices

developed tend to be carried out in preparation for the next phase, based on covering dots, copying and repeating, without considering that the structuring axes of the pedagogical work at this stage of education are interactions and games (BRASIL, 2017).

Although the Department of Education and Culture - SEDEC, of the Municipality of João Pessoa, seeks to lead continuous education during the school year, in order to achieve the objectives proposed in the Early Childhood Education curriculum, the National Common Curricular Base-BNCC (BRASIL, 2017), some questions worried us, such as: What are the challenges of becoming a teacher in Early Childhood Education? How to acquire teaching professionalism? What is the teacher's conception of professionalism?

However, dialoguing with agencies responsible for the formative process of teachers, essentially continuing education, it was possible to perceive the importance of this practice for teachers, but this formative work presents itself in a fragile way, mainly in this context of the pandemic generated by the COVID-19 virus that we are experiencing, in which teachers had to adapt to new ways of developing their profession, which makes formative work fragile, due to the need of the teacher to divide himself on the tripod : domestic work, teaching role, and formation, in the space of your home, in addition to the problems presented, regarding the lack of internet, among other problems arising from this pandemic period, such as economic, technological and social issues.

On the other hand, it is necessary to remember that teacher formation goes beyond learning techniques and methodologies, it requires greater involvement with the development of the child, the curriculum, and the ability to solve problems related to the context of the school or CREI. “We cannot say that the teacher's professional development is due solely to pedagogical development” (IMBERNÓN, 2011, p. 45, our translation).

Based on the above, this research starts from a different view of the construction of teaching professionalism as a collaborative, participatory and dynamic process, in the relationship between theory and practice. In view of this context, the general objective of this investigation was to understand the challenges of becoming a teacher to work in Early Childhood Education. The specific objectives: Recognize teaching professionalism and identify the teaching conception about their professionalism.

The concerns and objectives presented consider that the young child needs a qualified professional, who is aware of the concepts of childhood and Early Childhood Education, which according to Sarmiento (2004), a historically constructed childhood that presents a pluralization of ways of being a child. Just like Barbosa (2011), an Early Childhood Education that emerged in a context of intense mobilization of sectors of civil society, recognized in a

historical, cultural process, with the construction of legal frameworks related to children's rights, such as “care in daycare centers and preschools, children's social right that was affirmed in the 1988 Constitution, as well as the recognition of Early Childhood Education as a duty of the State with Education” (BRASIL, 1988).

Given this context, knowledge is very necessary for teachers who work in this stage of education. Thus, this investigation intends to contribute to the debate about the professionalism of teachers of the first stage of Basic Education, being necessary to remember that teacher formation goes beyond the learning of techniques and methodologies, it requires a greater involvement with the development of the child, the curriculum, and the ability to solve problems related to the school or CREI context. “We cannot say that the teacher's professional development is due solely to pedagogical development” (IMBERNÓN, 2011, p. 45, our translation).

It is worth noting that the construction of professionalism is a trend in recent years and seeks to ensure that teachers in their profession are able to keep up-to-date, based on a researcher attitude, paying attention to pedagogical, social, environmental, economic, cultural and technological changes. There is no definitive formation, but there is a process of constant reflection, with dialogue and scientific research being the main tools for the permanent training of teachers.

At the beginning of the investigation, we used authors such as Imbernón (2011) who point out “the necessary redefinition of teaching as a profession” (IMBERNÓN, 2011, p. 11), alerting to the transformation in the initial and permanent formation of the teacher. Just like Nóvoa (1995) who warns about teacher and professional formation, and shows us the construction of teacher identity, as well as Ramalho, Nuñez and Guathier (2004) who tries to train teachers and professionalize teaching, based on perspectives and challenges, among other theorists who develop studies and research regarding teaching professionalism and the issue of becoming a teacher, as well as official documents and legislation that deals with professionalism at this stage of education.

In view of this discussion, in the current situation of teacher formation, spaces for discussions are rarely made available to professionals for the construction of professionalism. This is justified by the fact that the education secretariats generally leave in the background the offer of continuing education for teachers at this stage of education, or the little appreciation of this professional in carrying out the search for this formation autonomously, as well as rarely the teachers. Higher Education Institutes make it easier for professors to enter postgraduate courses, highlighting obstacles either because of the offer of

vacancies/enrollments, the value of registrations or monthly fees, as well as the quality of the course offered.

Given this context, from the perspective of encouraging and accessing teachers who work in this stage of education, it is necessary to reflect on the action and about the action, linked to the theoretical discourse, against the backdrop of the teaching pedagogical posture that recognizes the essence of being a teacher, who perceives the possibility of transforming his/her practice. Reflection is understood here as the possibility of looking at practice in a different way, perceiving in professionalism the possibilities for change.

In this direction, it is observed that teachers have sought formative spaces to resize their pedagogical practice. However, it is worth noting that the teaching profession is constituted from structuring knowledge. In this way, it is expected that in the construction of the teachers' professionalism, the pedagogical practice will be contemplated, reflected and trained. This is the reason behind this problem. From the issues highlighted, professionalism needs to go beyond the limits and current requirements and cannot be seen only as a process of knowledge, which allows for a change of experience and innovation, or just a reflection of the teacher on his/her practice, but as the continuous reconstruction of the teacher's professional and personal identity.

Conceptual aspects of teaching professionalism as a professional life cycle

In the Brazilian scenario, professionalism takes impulse, due to its importance and implications in pedagogical practice. According to article 62 of the LDB of 1996 (BRASIL, 1996) to work in the first stage of Basic Education, the teacher must have a Pedagogy course or higher education in any degree and specialization in Early Childhood Education or a former pedagogic/teaching course plus the undergraduate course, and something else is necessary, in the sense that it has a broad knowledge about the young child and its specificities, failing that, the quality of the work to be developed at this stage of education is compromised..

On the other hand, the entry of the teacher in the first stage of Basic Education takes place through a service provision contract, generally, the municipalities in Paraíba do not carry out a public contest for this stage of education, leaving the filling of vacancies, in charge of the councilors, who fill this professional field with voters who contributed to elect it. This reality requires a more effective continuing education for the issue of becoming a teacher building professionalism. In this regard, Kramer (2006) highlights that “the formation of

teachers to deal with young children is a new task in the history of Brazilian schools and, for many, unknown” (KRAMER, 2006, p. 804, our translation).

In this direction, taking into account the expansion of enrollment in Early Childhood Education resulting from policies of diversification and institutional flexibility, it is necessary for the Education Departments to guarantee a favorable pedagogical environment for children, valuing their integral development, with a view to promoting learning by ensuring the guarantee of rights mentioned in the Federal Constitution of 1988 (BRASIL, 1988), in LDBEN, Law nº 9.394/96, which ensure Early Childhood Education as a duty of the State and reaffirm it as a subjective public right. It establishes as the 1st stage of Basic Education (BRASIL, 1996), in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (BRASIL, 2010), among other documents that govern this stage of education.

It is noteworthy that several studies converge towards the recognition of the need to better understand how to promote professionalism in new institutional scenarios, considering that a better understanding of what factors contribute to becoming a teacher can bring several contributions to the development of this stage of education. According to Imbernón (2011, p. 7, our translation):

It seems necessary that every educational institution must change radically, becoming something really different, appropriate to the enormous changes that shook the last quarter of the 20th century. In short, the teaching profession must abandon the conception prevailing in the 19th century of mere transmission of academic knowledge, from which it actually comes, and which has become entirely obsolete for the education of future citizens in a democratic society: plural, participatory, solidary, integrative.

Teaching professionalism is a process composed of three distinct and inseparable strands, the first centered on the child, which must be provided to develop globally, this demands space, time and effort, the second centered on Teaching Institutions, which must provide the means and resources for the promotion of learning as an active and participatory process and the third with a focus on the commitment, initiative and dedication of the teacher to remain in constant formation.

Complementing the subject, Imbernón (2011) emphasizes that the educational institution needs other social bodies to get involved and help it in the process of educating, as it is a variable that involves three perspectives - that of the Teaching Institution, with its methodologies and resources, that of the child, which includes abilities, cognition and interactions, and the teacher who constitutes a key factor for the promotion of learning and consequent improvement in the quality of education.

In this direction, several researchers argue that teaching professionalism will be legitimate when it contributes to the professional development of the teacher in the context of work and the improvement of professional learning (RAMALHO; NUÑEZ; GAUTHIER, 2004; IMBERNÓN, 2011).

Thus, in addition to a good infrastructure and didactic processes provided by the Early Childhood Education units, it is necessary to assess whether the experiences lived in the educational environment are promoting a feeling of satisfaction and development in children. Strengthening this idea, Freire (2013, p. 84, our translation) reports that:

[...] before any attempt to discuss technique, materials and methods for a class, the teacher must feel rested in the knowledge that the cornerstone is human curiosity. It is that what makes me ask, know, act, ask more, recognize.

In Early Childhood Education, the basis that supports learning is the affective relationship between the teacher and the child. Thus, it is necessary to take advantage of all situations of interaction between the child and the teacher to motivate them to relate, to investigate, to ask, to seek solutions. It is necessary to facilitate rich contexts that allow children to face new experiences that are interesting to them and in which they can experiment, manipulate, observe, etc. A good relationship between child and teacher is one that is established through real communication situations, which allow the student to make sense of their new learning.

In this sense, Kohan (2008, p. 21, our translation), “the practice of philosophy has educational implications insofar as it contributes to forming people willing to question the values and ideas that shape their lives and the lives of their peers”. Thus, it is important for teacher knowledge to be valued in teacher formation processes, based on their professional performance. According to Nóvoa, an international expert on academic formation for teachers, suggests a transformation in teacher formation. In this sense, Gatti *et al.* (2013, p. 17, our translation), mentions:

Nóvoa's proposals and their justifications can be summarized as follows: just as doctors are formed by doctors and engineers by engineers, for example, teachers need to be formed by teachers, that is, the profession, through its representatives, must play an important role in the formation of new professionals.

In this context, problematic situations appear and oblige the education professional to elaborate and build the meaning of each situation. For this reason, formation must approach

educational practice. In this regard, Imbernón (2011, p. 121, our translation), points out:

The contact of formation with educational practice makes professional knowledge enrich with other areas: moral and ethical, in addition to allowing the promotion of analysis and reflection on educational practice, trying to deliberately recompose the schemes, conceptions and beliefs that pedagogical knowledge has on teaching and learning. It would allow them to work for the benefit of the teacher and the education of humanity.

Based on these considerations, this article proposes to deepen the theme of teaching professionalism, presenting the role of the teacher as a challenge for the question of becoming a teacher. Furthermore, it examines, through statistical analysis, factors that can affect the performance at this stage of education, such as employment relationship, age range and knowledge of the constitution of professionalism.

To achieve the objectives of this study, a semi-structured interview was developed in electronic format, which obtained 20 valid responses and was validated through the tabulation of graphs. In addition to this analysis, the data obtained were arranged for descriptive statistics and analysis of variance.

Methodological procedures

We adopted the phenomenological approach to understand the challenges of becoming a teacher, with a view to teaching professionalism in Early Childhood Education, in the search to understand how subjects leave their impressions, feelings, perceptions and experiences about this object. “The phenomenological method focuses on subjective phenomena in the belief that essential truths about reality are based on lived experience” (MOREIRA, 2002, p. 108, our translation).

In this direction, we opted for a qualitative approach, which “focuses on the human being as an agent, and whose worldview is what really matters” (MOREIRA, 2002, p. 58, our translation). In this way, we question the phenomenon, putting in suspension the beliefs and presuppositions that surround this object in the context of this stage of education. Then, from the thematic analysis, we present the essence of this phenomenon, with personal and cultural elements, considering that in this phase, we reproduce the experiences lived by the interviewed subjects.

In this context, in harmony with the main focus of this research, a semi-structured interview was used in a virtual way, through the cell phone and carried out from 10 of July to 4 of August of 2021. "In the semi-structured interview there is greater freedom for the

interviewer, raise other questions, depending on the responses of the interviewees” (MOREIRA, 2002, p. 55, our translation). This instrument for obtaining information favors the description, explanation and understanding of the phenomenon studied, and was chosen to facilitate more information and better contact with teachers. In this way, a qualitative approach is developed, as it allows greater involvement between the researcher and his object of study. According to Minayo (1994), qualitative research can be like a detailed study of a given social phenomenon that seeks information to explain.

Regarding data analysis, we opted for thematic analysis, which consists of one of the modalities of content analysis, according to Bardin (1977, p. 105, our translation), thematic analysis aims to reveal what is behind the words on which it focuses, and thus “to discover the 'nuclei of meaning' that make up communication and whose presence or frequency of appearance can mean something for the chosen analytical objective”.

In this direction, due to the fact that the norms and guidelines of social distance remain in force in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2021 school year, since a large number of educational institutions continue to operate following the necessary sanitary measures, with 50% of children attended, that is, schools and CREI's with their distance activities alternating with face-to-face activities; or only remote activities since January 2021, in the case of Municipal Public Early Childhood Education in João Pessoa, the educational service is structured as follows: one week a group of children participate in person, while the other group stays at home and are attended to in a virtual way; the other week, the group that was at home is attended in person and vice versa.

In view of the above, we divided the interview into two stages, according to the themes:

- a) The first part of the interview comprised the themes related to sociodemographic factors: teacher formation, age group and employment relationship;
- b) The second part of the interview comprised four (4) affirmative themes represented by the sequences one (1) to four (4). These statements are represented by the letter R, which refers to the responses of the research subjects, when asked about the two questions: What are the challenges of becoming a teacher related to? How do we acquire teaching professionalism? According to frame 01 below:

Frame 1 – Affirmations about teaching professionalism

Nomenclature	Description
R 1	The challenges of becoming a teacher in Early Childhood Education are related to formation
R 2	We acquire teaching professionalism through experiences, studies and research
R 3	The challenges of becoming a teacher is to elaborate and build meanings of each situation in the teaching practice
R 4	Teaching professionalism is the constant search for pedagogical practice.

Source: Devised by the authors

Statistical procedures for data analysis

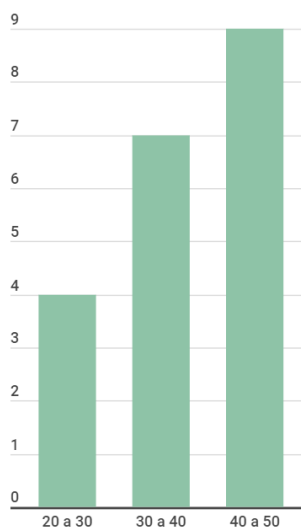
In accordance with the proposed objectives, the data were arranged for two types of statistical analyses: descriptive and variable, with the objective of evaluating whether the variables formation, age group and employment relationship somehow affect the issue of teaching professionalism in the first stage of Basic Education.

Results

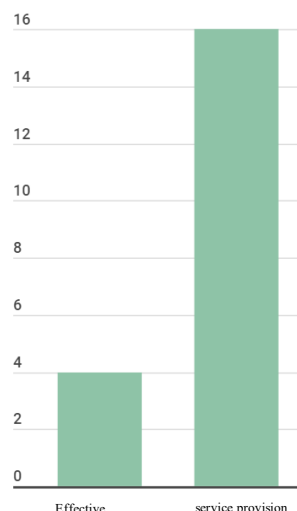
Sample characterization

This part of the data collection identified the general characteristics of the teachers and was composed of questions that dealt with the formation, age group and employment relationship of the research subjects. In this way, it is observed that the research obtained a total of 20 responses, mostly by subjects aged between 20 and 50 years, as well as presenting a greater number of teachers with an employment relationship of service provision, as demonstrated in the two graphs below:

Graph 1 – Age group



Graph 02 - Employment relationship

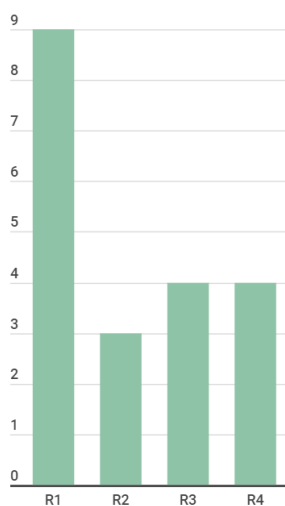


Source: Devised by the authors

Descriptive statistics

When analyzing the descriptive statistics regarding the messages of Early Childhood Education teachers about the professionalism arising from their experiences and formation, it is observed that the subjects feel satisfied with the initial course for the teaching profession, graduation, although some wish to attend a postgraduate course and for some reason they encounter obstacles, whether due to the lack of available time, economic conditions or the few places offered. As evidenced in Graph 02 below:

Graph 2 – Formation



Source: Devised by the authors

Analyzing the teachers' perception individually, it is evident that they feel stimulated by their Higher Education Institution, at the same time that their expectations are not met, in relation to access to postgraduate studies to seek greater professionalism.

When analyzing the statement R1, it appears that nine teachers showed greater satisfaction when asked about their initial professional formation and that the challenges of becoming a teacher in Early Childhood Education are related to continuing education

Given this context, in the statement R2, three professors demonstrated significance in their work activities, they were the ones who showed greater satisfaction in the teaching performance, which confirmed that teaching professionalism happens through experiences, studies and research.

The statement R3, we have that the challenges of becoming a teacher is to elaborate and build meanings of each situation in the performance. Thus, four teachers confirmed these challenges of becoming a teacher to work in Early Childhood Education.

In this direction, based on the statement R4, four teachers showed satisfaction in the view that teaching professionalism is the constant search for pedagogical practice.

Final considerations

This investigation aimed to understand the challenges of becoming a teacher, based on an analysis of teaching professionalism in early childhood education in the Municipal Public Education Network of João Pessoa-PB. In view of this aforementioned central objective of the research, we sought to discover new knowledge related to the scientific domain. Thus, we analyzed this phenomenon through the phenomenological approach as an investigation strategy, which provided support to understand the object of study in its concrete reality. Thus, we found that teaching professionalism is constituted throughout the trajectory of professional and personal life, based on knowings derived from knowledge of the world, social and cultural reality.

In this direction, it seems more coherent to point out the construction of the teachers' professionalism, from the observation that there may be uncertainties that involve the praxis, but what does not change is the child who continues to be the main reason for the school and who needs to have their full development guaranteed. Thus, the educational institution and the profession develops in a context of change and evolution that affects an efficient and effective way of teaching.

It is hoped that the conclusions from the realization of this research, can ultimately serve to clarify about the construction of a significant professionalism, which has positive reflexes in the teaching performance that work in the first stage of Basic Education, and consequently favors the global development of the student, without the teacher losing sight of the concept of children subject to rights who learn to read, write and relate through interactions and games.

Thus, this investigation served to instigate the search for professionalism in the perspective of becoming a teacher to act in this stage of education, however, we hope that it will arouse interest in other researchers in the deepening of this object of investigation, as well as serve for the reflection of the HEI to provide opportunities for professors to offer enrollment in postgraduate courses in education, facilitating the return of these undergraduate professionals to academia and, consequently, contributing to the construction of permanent teaching professionalism.

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