

THE FEDERAL INSTITUTES OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF A NEW PROFESSIONALITY OF TEACHING IN BRAZIL

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Abstract

This work discusses policies centered on the career and professionalization of teaching in Brazil, focusing on the Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology (IFs), and on the verticalization of teaching. Verticalization refers to teaching at two levels on the courses that encompasses technical professional teaching at secondary level and higher education, according to the demands of each region. Considering the character of this new structure, this research aimed at examining the working conditions of teachers, and the processes of professionalization, as well as different configurations of the teaching career and professionalism that result from the reorganization of the federal institutions of professional education. A qualitative methodological approach was employed, involving extensive gathering of document data and empirical research with the application of questionnaires and interviews with teachers from two campuses, one in the state of Bahia, and one from São Paulo. The theoretical concepts were taken from classic and contemporary authors of the areas of sociology and education. The analyses of the verticalization of teaching promoted by the Federal Institutes allowed us to identify three simultaneous and dialectic movements. One of professionalization, which takes place through the structuring of the career and increase in professional recognition; one of deprofessionalization, characterized by the intensification of work and destabilizing of identitarian references; and other of reprofessionalization, issuing from the peculiarities of the career and from the creation of new structures of teaching work at the two levels of teaching. This context of changes has engendered dialectically a process of reprofessionalization, in the sense of developing a new professionalism of teaching.

Keywords: *Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology (IFs), verticalization of teaching, reprofessionalization, teaching career.*

1. Introduction

The Federal Institutes of Education, Science and Technology (IFs, from the Portuguese *Institutos Federais*) were created in Brazil in 2008 from the integration of institutions of professional education already established at that time. Today, Brazil has 38 IFs spread across several campuses in the country. Among other features, the new institution was organized by the verticalization of teaching. Namely, through offering courses that cover from initial and continued education, and technical professional education at secondary school level, to higher education at undergraduate and graduate levels. To guarantee such diverse offer, the work configuration of teachers was changed, giving rise to the career of Teacher of Basic, Technical, and Technological Education (EBTT, from the Portuguese Magistério do Ensino Básico, Técnico e Tecnológico). After such changes, the working conditions of teachers also underwent significant alterations.

Prior to the creation of the IFs, the institutes of professional education hired teachers for separate careers, and with different professional roles, differentiating those that worked at secondary school level from those that taught only at higher education level. With the creation of the IFs, the two groups of professionals were integrated in the same career, as to be able to work in the different courses, levels, and modalities of teaching offered at the campuses in which they work.

Taking as the pivot of our analysis the teacher work under the verticalization of teaching, this work discusses the change in the meanings of teaching professionalism at the IFs, which were previously based on the work of teachers at just one level of education. With the reconfiguration of the IFs and with teachers working at two levels of teaching, new meanings for the teaching activity emerge, indicating of a process of reprofessionalization in that context.

The investigation takes as its premise that educational structures are subject to the networks of functions, and social interdependence relationships, in a continuous and a dynamical process, as pointed out

by Elias (2010). This process also occurs in the constitution of the professions resulting from interdependent mediations between social needs and the demands of individuals that collectively create and impart meaning to these professions (Elias, 1950). To deal with more specific questions, the support of several authors was enlisted, such as the French ones Maubant, Roger and Lejeune (2013), Demailly and De La Broise (2009), Wittorski and Roquet (2013), among others, who have been investigating processes of professionalization, deprofessionalization, and reprofessionalization in several professional fields.

Maubant, Roger and Lejeune (2013) point out that the studies about professionalization often reveal its limits or obstacles to it, whilst evoking the negative effects and impacts that befall workers, the forms of suffering at work, job precariousness, and difficulties in the exercise of work activities. From that comes the strength of their argument that, in order to understand what deprofessionalization is, one has to be as close as possible to concrete professional situations. It is within such dynamics that one can better capture the contradictions and conflicts that characterize such processes, given that the State presents their policies as proposals of professionalization. However, when being carried out they bring about aspects that contradict such perspective.

Based in these authors, Bueno (2014) remarks that the idea of professionalization is related to the social recognition of the professional activities and to the efficacy of the contribution of the individuals to the activities of production; whereas the idea of deprofessionalization comprises the weakening or loss of professional identity references.

As a dialectical synthesis, reprofessionalization has been understood in this study as the process of reorganization of teaching professionalism, whose identity is grounded in the contradiction between those elements. Namely, the specificities of the reorganization of the career, greater linking to institutional principles, and the exercise of teaching at two different levels of education.

2. Aim and objectives of the study

With those issues in mind, this work has as its objective to analyze the working conditions of teachers at the IFs, considering the teaching activities at two simultaneous levels: secondary school level technical professional basic education, and higher education. To such end, it seeks to examine:

- the meanings that the organization of work at the IFs acquires for the teachers with regard to professionalization and/or deprofessionalization; and
- how the teaching professionalism is expressed considering the verticalization of teaching, and the working conditions of teachers at those institutes.

3. Research design and methodology

To fulfil those objectives, the investigation adopted various research procedures. Data are from two main sources: one of a legal nature comprised of official documents referring to the structure and functioning of the IFs and of the teaching career; and another of a qualitative order, consisting of questionnaires and interviews with 31 teachers belonging to two IFs, from Bahia and São Paulo states.

The document *corpus* includes legislation concerning the legal direction of the IFs, covering from their antecedents up to their creation in 2008. The analysis of this abundant material, added to the collection of studies that analyzed the history and the teaching career at the federal institutions of professional education, allowed us to see aspects of teaching ranging from the very first professional groups until the constitution of the EBTT career and of their current configurations. In this aspect, the theoretical support found in several works by Norbert Elias (1950 and 2010) was valuable, in order to analyze the interdependence between the professions, the individuals that constitute them, and the social needs that engender them.

These materials supplied the basis for an outline of how this professional group transitioned from a situation of being workers without a career, even working at schools of professional training, to a profile of professionals with a specific career within the federal public service, with complex and diversified labor attributions at two different levels of education.

Empirical data were collected during the doctorate studies carried out by Silva (2020) and Missaki (2020), involving the application of questionnaires to 51 teachers, and the conduction of interviews with 31 teachers, ensuring strict observance of standards of ethical research. The collection of testimonies was based on the concept of comprehensive interview discussed by Bourdieu (2008), who takes Kaufmann (2013) as his main reference.

Such procedure allowed a deeper theoretical dive into the problem under investigation, making use of categories that the interpretation of documents by itself would not warrant. For example, it allowed considering the perceptions of individuals that experience and weave in a complex manner the organization of teaching work at the IFs, without always agreeing with the direction adopted by Government policies. This direct contact with informants made it possible to observe the complexity of teaching at those institutions, and the network of interdependencies that configures teaching professionalism within a process of reprofessionalization emerging between the dimensions of professionalization and deprofessionalization.

This double perspective of analysis afforded a wider view of the effects and repercussions of the reforms carried out at the IFs, by stimulating the dialogue between the macro policies of teacher education and the micro policies that permeate the school context involving the life and individuality of teachers. It thereby enabled the perception that a new teaching professionalism is emerging in the context of the IFs.

4. Discussion and findings

The aspects considered in this section refer to elements that emerged from the examination of the working conditions of teachers at the IFs, namely: composition of working shift, professional attributions, management and control of the teaching activity, incentives to professional qualification, and remuneration. The aim in the present context is to show how those elements are interconnected, thereby avoiding interpretations based exclusively either on professionalization or deprofessionalization processes.

4.1. Composition of working shift

This issue can be observed under two perspectives. On the one hand, the relation between class hour and activity hour contributes to professionalization by exposing and attaching importance to the work outside the classroom, as well as to collective work and planning activities. On the other hand, the working shift is intertwined with processes of deprofessionalization by stimulating the intensification of work because of the complexity of attributions.

The organization of teaching activities within the working shift is regulated by each Institute, as long as the general parameters established are followed, which affect the following limits: from 10 to 20 weekly classes for full-time teachers; 8 to 12 weekly classes for part-time teachers. The remaining hours are dedicated to teaching support, research and innovation, extension, administration, and continued education.

Although at first sight this working shift may seem ideal, particularly when compared to those of other public education networks, there are disputes about it. Araújo and Mourão (2021), for example, consider this working shift an element of precarization of the teaching activity, for requiring greater mental effort from the teacher, adaptation to the diversity of classes, and more time for the preparation of classes due to the verticalized work.

In this sense, the deprofessionalization of the teaching career in EBTT does not necessarily mean the same as its precarization. The deprofessionalization encompasses identitarian transformations (Tardif & Lessard, 2014) by destabilizing the reference of teaching professionalism previously based on a single level of teaching. The complexity of attributions can be understood as qualification of the character of teaching, expressing its professionalism; but, by contrast, it is intertwined with processes that characterize deprofessionalization, since teachers are led to the intensification of work in order to respond to the increase in demands proceeding from principles of polyvalence and multitasking.

4.2. Professional attributions

Some of the teachers interviewed expressed the perception that the increase in the complexity of the tasks requires longer working hours. Although not officially instituted, it consumes more time, which often forces the teacher to work weekends. Without that, they cannot cope with teaching, research, and extension activities (offered for groups outside IFs). And, as some of them affirmed, without work in research and extension, classes suffer in quality. The logic of the work based on polyvalence was understood by teachers as having both positive and negative points, which signal to aspects of deprofessionalization through the intensification of work, as well as professionalization through the possibility of professional growth.

On the positive side, teachers mentioned the enhancement of experience. At the same time, the gain represented by polyvalence has stimulated the intensification of work. According to several statements, working at two levels of education is positive to enhance pupils' formation, but the teacher has to work much more. Based on Dal Rosso (2008) and Apple (1995) this can be interpreted as the increase in workload due to the need for greater commitment from the teacher, and greater efforts to carry out a work that, formerly, did not require extending the work shift. By embracing the verticalization of teaching, teachers feel overloaded with the need to develop multiple curricula, and to cater for the diversity of courses on offer. To cope with those requirements the teacher must be a flexible and versatile professional, regardless of their initial education or previous professional experience.

However, it is surprising that, despite the fact that the teaching staff of IFs is comprised of specialized professionals, having concluded a licentiate course is not a requisite for entering the career. Therefore, professionals can be admitted who, without initial pedagogical training, need to face the specificities of teaching at the professionalizing basic education level. Subjected to considerable pressure of responsibilities in this context, their professional nature and role becomes still more complex, raising new questions about the traditional conceptions of teaching, particularly about the requirement to balance polyvalence and multitasking.

4.3. Management and control of teaching

In addition to work overload, the mechanisms of control of professional activities also contribute to deprofessionalization. The guidelines for the organization of the teaching at the IFs establish the obligation of controlling both teacher attendance and teacher productivity through activities in regular individual work plans and reports. The teaching activity is, therefore, measured both by the physical presence at the school, as is commonly required at basic education schools, and through the fulfilment of goals, productivity, and presentation of results, as required by teachers in higher education in Brazil. Such organization for the control and monitoring of work marks the complexity of this career, and exposes, through its simultaneity, the articulation between elements of professionalization and deprofessionalization.

Teachers interviewed demonstrated different perspectives on the need and pertinence of such control mechanisms, especially on the teacher attendance control. Favorable opinions pointed to the pertinence of the control to guarantee the fulfilment of professional activities; however, there were positions contrary to it associating the control via electronic timecards to a depersonalization of the teaching activity, considering that, due to the specific features of this activity, teachers also develop activities outside their campuses.

4.4. Incentive to professional qualification

The teaching career at the IFs shows the convergence of rights and duties prescribed in two different national laws. The Law of Guidelines and Bases of Education No. 9394 of December 20, 1996 establishes that the valuation of professionals of education must be promoted with the purpose of ensuring their continued professional improvement, including periodic paid leaves of absence to that end. The Law No. 8112 of December 11, 1990, which deals with the juridical labor regime of public servants, prescribes that civil servants can request paid leaves of absence to attend graduate programs in any region of the country. Thus, teachers at the IFs have the legal right to request leaves of absence to obtain qualification by graduate programs, whilst maintaining their wages for up to 4 years, and of having the academic titles thereby obtained considered for promotions within the teaching career, and as a component for academic title allowances. From the point of view of the teachers this is a major incentive to seek professional development.

4.5. Wages

This aspect also contributes to professionalization, since many teachers agree that is the most attractive feature of the career. A teacher said: “When you arrive from the state [school network], where progression is much smaller than at the IFs, you come here, and you find it satisfactory. The [salary] difference is huge!”. Other studies, such as that of Jardim (2018), also found that the salary of teachers at IFs is considered as an element of professional satisfaction, particularly when compared to the average teacher paid in Brazil.

The Title Allowance (RT, from the Portuguese *Retribuição por Titulação*) is a distinguishing feature in the wage composition of EBTT teachers, and it can mean a significant increase in wages, depending on the teacher’s formation and/or experience. If we take the wages of EBTT teachers and compare them with the average of the teacher’s salary in the country, we find them rather higher. The wages of an EBTT teacher near the top of their career can be almost three times that of a teacher in a similar position in the São Paulo State School network, for example.

The aspects that interfere in the professionalization process can, therefore, be observed through the incentive to professional development, as well as through payment conditions. However, other aspects, such as control and management processes over the teaching activity, and the intensification of work, can be associated to processes of deprofessionalization, as indicated above.

5. Conclusions

Understanding by professionalization as processes that affirm teacher professionalism, and by deprofessionalization as the processes that deny it, this study shows that the interdependence between the direction of the policies established for the IFs and the resistance of teachers to such guidance express dynamics of teacher professionalization, deprofessionalization, and reprofessionalization. It results from accepting claims for change in working conditions and professional development in the EBTT teaching career, whilst redefining the features of the teaching activity in courses at different levels and modalities of education.

As a synthesis between the movements of professionalization and deprofessionalization analyzed here, the organization of the teaching activity at the IFs also engenders processes of reprofessionalization that constitute a professionalism characteristic of the EBTT teaching career. In this respect, the study points out: the specificities of the organization of this career, the links between teaching activity and the organizational principles of the IFs, particularly verticalization and interiorizing of basic and higher public education, apart from political and pedagogical perspectives of the work of teachers present within their respective student publics. It is important to note that this latter aspect has been little investigated, and deserves more attention in future studies, in Brazil and abroad.

The processes of implementation of policies that contribute to the EBTT teaching career in Brazil represent social progress in various aspects, but do not imply the guarantee and permanence of these

conditions, considering that in the history of the institutes of professional education the teaching career has been dependent on the directions taken by each mandate of federal government. These uncertainties clearly compromise the continuity of these policies, and the implementation of new actions focused on teacher professionalism and professionalization.

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¹The complete list of legal documents analyzed can be found in Missaki (2020) and Silva (2020) listed above.