



## Contributions and flaws in beginning teachers' education in a public education network

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### Abstract

Studies investigating the first years of teachers' professional activity have advanced specially in the last decade in Brazil. This research adopted a qualitative approach and aims to analyze the contributions and flaws observed in the inservice education of beginning teachers developed by the Education Secretariat of a municipality in the state of Paraná. Its specific objectives include to identify education initiatives proposed by the Municipal Education Secretariat targeting beginning teachers and verify which actions of these teachers' education initiatives favor or not their professional learning. Fifteen beginning teachers working in the early years of elementary school took part in the research. Other participants were two teaching and education management supervisors who work for the Municipal Education Secretariat. Data was collected using a questionnaire, a semi-structured interview, and document analysis. The data analysis was carried out based on content analysis. The research revealed that the education initiatives experienced by those beginning teachers occurred mainly in conjunction with other teachers working in the same municipal network or school. The very few moments specifically prepared for beginning teachers were noticeably characterized by clarifications about the organization and functioning of the education network. Regarding their participation in courses, they reported that very few times their expectations related to their education needs were met. However, they recognized that they always learned something on those occasions. The predominance of a theoretical approach in their education was also reported, thus they valued the contribution of initiatives that had a more practical approach and exchange of experience between the professionals.

**Keywords:** Beginning teachers, Teacher education, Inservice teacher education, Elementary school teachers.

### 1. Introduction

Studies on the beginnings of the teaching profession – a period related to the first years of entering the career, as presented by Huberman (1995) – have advanced in Brazil, especially since the last decade.

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This period became an object of interest in the education research field, given the realization of its importance for teachers, which is highlighted by the fact that it is during this period that they usually experience some doubts related to the curriculum and its development, the feeling of little knowledge of the school context, classroom management, student assessment and the relationship established with families, among other aspects, as discussed by Vaillant and Marcelo (2012). Such feelings generate fears and insecurities, even though the beginning teacher has gone through an initial training process before starting teaching professionally.

Entering the career is a unique period for teachers, even if more experienced teachers may consider that the experience after this period can be as challenging every time they face a new work environment. For example, throughout their career they have to work with classes in different stages of schooling, take over functions different from those already experienced, and they sometimes enter new education systems, which can also make them feel like beginners in some way, as they are subject to insecurity in the face of what may be considered new by them.

In the context of reflections on the period of professional initiation, the literature has highlighted the importance of monitoring beginning teachers, including through specific programs, also emphasizing the need for continuous development to be offered to those teachers. Such programs must be specific, aiming at meeting their demands, as they require attention and care from schools, co-workers, and formal education management agencies, whether public or private, otherwise, they might feel neglected and, consequently, abandon the profession.

Although the continuous development of beginning teachers is a relevant topic in the context of reflections on teacher education, research that takes it as an object of investigation is not as frequent. This was evidenced by the integrative review study (referring to the period from 2009 to 2019) carried out by Castro (2021), whose purpose was to identify research related to the continuous development of beginning teachers and analyze what the results presented by them indicated about this aspect of their education.

In the survey, Castro (2021) identified that, in addition to not being a significant number, studies related to the topic revealed important aspects, such as the fact that it is still a challenge to guarantee beginning teachers a systematic process of continuous development and the importance of relating it to the school context.

According to Castro (2021), in addition to not being thoroughly analyzed in the scope of research in education, the continuous development of teachers at the beginning of their careers is also diverse in terms of meeting their specific demands and, consequently, its contributions to their practical work.

In this sense, considering the importance of expanding studies on the continuous development of teachers at the beginning of their careers, and, with it, the relevance of better understanding how this training is being carried out, this study aims to analyze contributions and weaknesses of continuous education for beginning teachers, initiated by the Municipal Department of Education (MDE) of a municipality in Paraná. As specific objectives, the study sought to identify training initiatives offered by the MDE for beginning teachers,

and to verify which elements of those initiatives favored or not the professional learning of those teachers.

It seems relevant to mention that the interest in carrying out this study was also fostered by an *online*<sup>3</sup> publication on the website of the MDE participating in this research, which informed that meetings are held for teacher training throughout the year, and that “[...] a series of activities for beginning teachers [...]” was organized, also highlighting that “[...] a series of information about the profile of the municipality’s education professional, their responsibilities, rights and duties [...]” was made available.

To achieve the objectives proposed in the study, in addition to this introduction, the article clarifies the methodology used, discusses the continuous development of teachers and beginning teachers, presents the analysis and discussion of the research results and final considerations.

## 2. Methodological Aspects

For the development of this research<sup>4</sup>, a qualitative study was carried out including 15 beginning teachers (BT) (who had been teaching for up to three years), working with the initial years of elementary education in municipal schools, 2 teaching and education management supervisors (MS1 and MS2) from the MDE.

The beginning teachers were identified by surveying the list of teachers summoned by MDE in January 2019, to occupy the positions listed in the municipal public test<sup>5</sup> held in the previous year. The participant supervisors also contributed with a list of the teachers that had been recently hired by the MDE (in the 5 previous years). The list included the teachers’ names, date of birth, contract date, school where they would work, and the situation of each professional at that time (e.g., working, maternity leave, sick leave, etc.).

Using the list of teachers that had been summoned to occupy their position after the test, raffles<sup>6</sup> were carried out using the tool Numbers (free option), made available by Random.org<sup>7</sup>, to get to the 15 participant teachers considering the preset criteria of inclusion in this study, as follows: having up to three years of experience in teaching, working with elementary school in the municipal network, and accepting to take part in the research.

Teachers whose names had been picked in the raffle carried out using the MDE list (the names were numbered, and those numbers were used to identify them in the raffle) were then found in the list of names of recently hired by the MDE to confirm whether they were working in the municipal network, in which school, and what their current situation was. After this procedure, the

<sup>3</sup> *Online* article by the City Hall of Ponta Grossa. Retrieved from: <https://pontagrossa.pr.gov.br/node/42633>. Accessed on: 25 Oct. 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Research subjected to the Human Being Research Ethics Committee. C.A.A.E: 29693320.6.0000.0105.

<sup>5</sup> Teachers took the public test according to the Call n° 002/2018 (Ponta Grossa, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Twelve raffles were needed using numbers from 1 to 201 (referring to the number of teachers summoned to take over their positions in the municipal education network). The raffles were repeated whenever the teachers did not meet the study inclusion criteria, and also when numbers that had already been picked appeared. The raffles were repeated until we reached 15 participants, a previously defined number during the study design.

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.random.org/integers/>.

schools were contacted – and then the teachers – via telephone and email, the research was explained, and we verified with the teachers whether they were beginning teachers and whether they agreed to take part in the study.

The supervisors were interviewed for data collection. Regarding the participant teachers, data was produced using a questionnaire (Q) – with open and closed questions, made available both *online* and on paper – and a semi-structured interview (I). We also analyzed the document Curriculum Reference for the Initial Years of Elementary Education (Ponta Grossa, 2020). The data was treated using content analysis, which enabled its organization into categories and subcategories emerging from the data (Bardin, 2016).

### 3. Development

This study regards teacher's education as a complex process, mainly for addressing beginning teachers' education. It is also seen as a continuous process that formally starts with their initial education.

Vaillant and Marcelo (2012, p. 29) explained that the concept of education is not identified or exhausted within other concepts such as education, teaching, or training, commonly used when the theme is discussed. Those authors understand that the concept of education “[...] includes a personal dimension of holistic human development, which must be taken into account in contrast with other rather technical conceptions”. They also pointed out that such concept regards each teachers' capability and will to develop this aspect of their education.

In a Brazilian classical work on teachers' education, Marcelo García emphasized that, in this process, teachers:

[...] are involved individually or in groups, in learning experiences through which they acquire knowledge or improve what they already know, develop competences and willingness, which enable them to interfere professionally in their teaching development, in the curriculum, and in the school, aiming at improving the quality of the education they students receive (Marcelo García, 1999, p. 26).

For that author, teachers' education includes learning experiences and teaching improvement, in the same way it is described by Romanowski (2012).

Regarding beginning teachers' education, specifically, this text situates it in the field of continuous development, that is, after the initial education, but although it is part of the continued training, at the same time, it differs from it given the particularities of the period of entrance in the career and the attention it demands.

Continuous development is highly relevant for the professional activity, for this reason it requires attention to topics related to the space and time of the teachers' work. Therefore, it must be linked to the school and to the classroom and to teaching and learning, since those are “[...] considered spaces of reference of the whole education process [...]” (Oliveira, 2016, p. 282).

Romanowski (2012) pointed out that teachers' continued education is a requirement of contemporaneity, mainly because teachers' education is developed in a continuous process, in which formal and informal actions

complement each other. Such process is influenced (informally) even by the experience of those teachers as students in their basic education, going on into their initial professional education and continuing “[...] throughout teachers’ careers [...] and in the sequence of courses, programs, and projects” (Romanowski, 2012, p. 138).

Giordan, Hobold and André (2017) emphasized education needs of beginning teachers and explained that considering their work conditions contributes to the improvement of their teaching actions and to the definition of public policies. They also pointed out that:

[...] it is relevant to provide teachers with both types of continuous development, focusing on theoretical and practical issues, related to the classroom activities, so that they can improve the teaching work and boost their professional development, which results in the improvement of the students’ learning process (Giordan; Hobold; André, 2017, p. 314).

Likewise, Sousa *et al.* (2020) referred to the importance of designing a methodological path for the continuous development of beginning teachers, based on the specific needs of the beginning of this career, which is still a challenge according to those authors.

This article focuses on the concept of education needs put forward by Benedito Antolí, Imbernón Muñoz and Féllez Rodriguez (2001, p. 3 *apud* Lima, 2015, p. 346), which include:

[...] both the set of aspects considered inherent in the new teachers’ development and without which they present an education gap, just as they request as necessary and from which they wish to obtain qualification to carry out their work.

For those authors, a dual and dialectic perspective exist in relation to education needs, one which privileges at the same time and in a balanced way, both what is understood as teachers’ weakness from the institutional perception and what teachers feel as a need, in this case beginning teachers.

For Sousa *et al.* (2020), different tools can be used to know such needs, such as field diaries, education portfolios, and narratives, among others. Such understanding confirms the statement by Vaillant and Marcelo (2012, p. 173) that “[...] when teachers take part in the design of their own learning, their commitment grows”. Therefore, with increased commitment, the possibility of new learnings by the beginning teachers from their teaching practice also increases.

### **3.1 About the continuous education of beginning teachers in the municipal education network researched**

An analysis of the municipal document entitled Curricular Reference for the Initial Years of Elementary School, regarding the continuous development of education professionals, revealed that according to the document, “[...] their education must provide them with spaces and moments that allow education



professionals to reflect upon their selfknowledge and knowledge of society where they live and work” (Ponta Grossa, 2020, p. 48).

The same document indicates that the themes to be addressed in such education must originate from the teachers' needs in the teaching-learning process, as well as from the challenges faced by the school management teams. The document also emphasizes that these needs will be identified by pedagogical advisors who, according to the Curricular Reference, are the Secretariat's technicians that will monitor education institutions (Ponta Grossa, 2020).

The Curricular Reference provide for special moments of education possibilities in the schools, such as the collective pedagogical work time (HTPC), hybrid continuous development (onsite meetings and online platforms), onsite education events, Pedagogical Practice Reports (Education Congress), Pedagogical Advisory (for management teams), Groups of studies, and partnerships for education, among others, and also provides for beginning teachers development (as a MDE coordinated education action for the improvement of the knowledge of beginning teachers and theoretical-methodological guidance for the municipal education network work) (Ponta Grossa, 2020).

Representando the MDE, the teaching and education management supervisors (SG) who took part in this research confirmed the data set forth in the Curricular References, and stated:

*[...] We also hold the onsite education, which is carried out with the Secretariat's technicians, there is the Education Congress, practice and experience reports, and the connecting knowledges. There are several moments in which you can have access in this document [...]* (SG1).

*[...] The Secretariat. It believes that the main educator of inservice teachers is the Pedagogical Coordinator. We invest a lot in the qualification of Pedagogical Coordinators, because currently our network has almost four thousand teachers. [...]. There aren't specific conditions, only the technicians that are here at the Secretariat, to carry out the whole education process. The Pedagogical Coordinator [...] is the main educator. Their main function is to qualify those teachers* (SG1).

The supervisor, in addition to mentioning the possibilities provided for in the Curricular Reference (Ponta Grossa, 2020) of the municipal education network, highlighted the relevance for of Pedagogical Coordinators for teachers' education in schools, thus valuing the school as a professional education space.

Furthermore, regarding the specific continuous development plan for beginning teachers in the municipal network, one of the supervisors clarified: “The Secretariat has prepared an education plan for beginning teachers [...]” (SG2). She also reported:

*In 2019, the beginning teachers were trained by the Secretariat. There were onsite meetings throughout the year. Every two*

*months, beginning teachers were trained in one area of knowledge [...]” (SG2).*

The Supervisor (SG2) emphasized that beginning teachers working in the municipal network were included in the onsite continuous development program in 2019, and that the training was related to different knowledge areas, that is, directly related to teaching.

Regarding the data collected from the beginning teachers, the main participants in this research, the corpus provided four categories of analysis related to their continuous education, namely: education actions provided by the MDE; actions originated by the beginning teachers; Weaknesses in the continuous education provided by the MDE; and Contributions of the continuous education provided by the MDE. These categories are analyzed below:

### 3.1.1 Education actions provided by the MDE

This category refers to the actions related to the continuous education of beginning teachers, as identified in the analysis corpus, and is presented in two subcategories: actions directly related to the MDE and Actions provided by the school.

Regarding the results that generated the first subcategory – Actions directly related to the MDE – We verified that the research participant teachers were provided with some opportunities of education, which occurred through direct initiatives by the MDE and also through the opportunities offered to the teachers to take part in courses offered by the MDE in partnership with other institutions. Some examples of the teachers' comments referring to them are presented below:

*I've already had some courses focusing on elementary school and mathematical literacy promoted by the MDE (P1/Q).*

*The courses are offered by the MDE. Every year, there are courses for teachers of all areas/years (I mean, subjects). Those courses are in the area of literacy, mathematical literacy, sciences, human development, that is, they cover all areas of knowledge, and there are lectures too (Education Congress) on several themes (P4/Q).*

*It is offered by the MEE (Municipal Department of Education) by the teachers who work for the MDE. This education action is a part time activity, in a place different from that where we work [...] (P5/Q).*

*The MDE always offers courses, they help us to keep updated. Also, because the BNCC implementation, there were some changes in the content organization (P13/ Q).*

Courses and lectures referring to the curriculum knowledge areas were developed by teachers working for the MDE, as indicated by the participants. The MDE also made partnerships with other institutions such as cooperatives and foundations to hold courses. In addition, other courses offered by the

Ministry of Education and the State Education Secretariat, for example, were also mentioned by the participants.

The possibility of creating courses, programs and projects to provide continuous development for the teachers was emphasized by Romanowski (2012) as one of the characteristics of this type of education, which is seen as a potentially positive initiative that might cater for the demands identified by the MDE, as discussed by Benedito Antolí, Imbernón Muñoz and Félez Rodríguez (2001).

However, although positive points were presented and justified in the teachers reports for the possibility of improvement and update, most referred to the continuous development offered to the municipal network teachers as a whole, and in which beginning teachers were included. It seems relevant to draw attention to this detail since very few testimonies mentioned specific initiatives targeting beginning teachers, which can be verified in the excerpts below, which confirm the results obtained by Leone (2011) and Silva (2014) about the existing need for specific continuous education for beginning teachers:

*At the beginning of last year, when I entered, there were courses for beginning teachers, however, they were discontinued (P2/Q).*

*I don't know why they interrupted that course, if it was lack of information, or they did not inform us about it (P2/E).*

*There were some, but it was more like an introduction (P8/E).*

*I attended 3 or 4 meetings [...] directed [...] to some subjects, planning issues, how they were structured, things like this (P10/E).*

*When I started there was a short course about planning and some bureaucratic guidance (P10/Q).*

*[...] There were courses for beginning teachers, about literacy and mathematical literacy (P13/Q).*

The teachers highlighted that there were specific meetings for beginners, reporting, however, that they were few and discontinued. According to research data, those meetings briefly introduced the education network, planning, and bureaucratic issues linked to the activities to be carried out by teachers.

It is interesting to note, however, that the report found in one of the teachers' the questionnaire (P13/Q) about the past occurrence of courses discussing literacy and mathematical literacy for beginning teachers, in fact, proved to be related to the training process of all the teachers in the municipal network, instead of referring to something exclusive to beginning teachers.

In this way, the initial meetings provided by the MDE, specifically for beginners, came close to what could constitute part of an onboarding program



for beginning teachers and, if so<sup>8</sup>, would correspond to the level of assistance called by Vaillant and Marcelo (2012) as “preparation”, which includes an overview of the school and its operation, to which information about the education network can be added.

Interestingly, the participants indicated that they missed more specific meetings for beginners being available, stating, for example: “I don't know why they interrupted that course [...]” (P2/E). The testimony of one of the teaching and education management supervisors confirmed that understanding about the approach of the education network, which marked the meetings held for beginning teachers:

*The moment the teacher joins the network, [...], takes over his or her position, we have a specific training sequency for beginning teachers. It aims to presente all the guidelines, methodologies, practices, and the way the municipal network is organized. As a teacher in the network, they need to know their procedures in this sense. Then, these initial meetings, they learn about the Reference, the school organization, o the part time and ful- time school are, the planning, what are their rights and duties. [...]* (SG1).

Certainly, having a general view of the municipal network/school and their functioning is relevant for beginning teachers; however, other levels of assistance or support should also be made available, namely, guidance and practice, according to Vaillant and Marcelo (2012):

[...] guidance implies the instruction, regarding the curriculum and the efficient teaching practice, opportunities of observing lessons and receiving feedback from a mentor; while the practice includes the continuation of the interchange with the mentor, teaching workload reduction, participation in professional development programs and their evaluation (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012, p. 143).

The presence of a mentor teacher monitoring the work of beginning teachers, as highlighted by the authors, has been valued by researchers in the area. However, mentoring will be relevant as long as the mentor is someone who knows and has “[...] dexterity in their duties” (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012, p. 141). In the case of this study, no reference to such a mentor teacher was identified for tutoring beginners, which could be, if it existed, a positive aspect for their professional learning.

As for the second subcategory – actions provided by the school – we observed that such actions are directly linked to the school management teams – direction and pedagogical coordination, as expressed in the excerpts below:

*[...] I proposed in my planning what I intended to do. The pedagogical coordinator arranged a meeting. On that day and time, I went to her classroom. She sat at the back, I talked to the children. She let me do whatever I thought I should. Then,*

<sup>8</sup> The proposal is presented as a course for beginning teachers.

*she came to the front of the classroom. Wow! It was really nice! Very nice, indeed! (P1/E).*

*[...] my pedagogical coordinator... She gave the texts that we should read and then we discussed. Those who were new at school. It was another teacher and I. She gave us the texts... We read... We sat and discussed with her... Talk about the doubts. Wow! It was cool! (P1/E).*

*They are very welcoming. Seek to fulfil your needs. When you have doubts, they always try to give examples of how to work (P2/E).*

*[...] at the school, there are also moments of learning. They usually occur once every quarter [...] then we have this training. In the school environment, we sit, [...] the pedagogical coordinator suggests a theme, we sit and study it (P4/E).*

*The continuous education that called my attention to these details was the one given by the school's principal, who always sought to help me (P13/Q).*

The actions related to the school management team (although they may have been triggered to some extent by the MDE), as indicated by the beginning teachers, resulted in a feeling of acceptance on the part of those teachers, which is relevant. Moments of study carried out in schools were also reported, as well as situations indicating some type of support given to them, such as help with existing doubts, examples on how to work on certain content, etc., possibly because the school considered the short time they had been teaching a relevant factor.

Also noteworthy is the situation reported by one of the beginning teachers (P1/E), in which the school's pedagogical coordinator observed the teacher's teaching practice and, after this observation, took over the lesson, to continue the activity that was being carried out by the beginning teacher, so that he/she could observe it.

The Pedagogical Coordinator's effort appears to have been to provide feedback on the work that had been developed by the beginning teacher. In addition to being a different practice from what is commonly seen in schools – although it had been planned in the municipality's Continuing Training for Education Professionals (Ponta Grossa, 2020) – the coordinator established a relationship of collaboration, partnership and complicity with the teacher after having carried out the observation, because, as indicated, his/her perception was that “Wow! It was very nice! Really nice!” (P1/E), pointing out his positive feeling.

It seems relevant to point out, however, that this was the only report of such an experience, which demonstrates that, although different training possibilities are planned by the MDE, in its guiding document (Ponta Grossa, 2020), the school has a decisive role in putting them into practice, or not, which may constitute a drawback in certain circumstances.

Another aspect to be considered is that, even though the MDE Supervisor highlighted the schools' Pedagogical Coordination as the main

responsible for the training of beginning teachers, the participants also pointed out the school principal's support in this process, which is a positive aspect since principals are part of the school management team and should not be limited to bureaucratic activities, considering that management has "[...] technical, pedagogical and political dimensions that interact and dialogue, which is why they cannot be dissociated [...]" (Santos, 2013, p. 47).

Although some of the teachers' reports have highlighted positive aspects about continued training and indicated that there is a careful look at beginning teachers by the school management team, there are also indications that some participants are more cautious about how they perceive the training activities developed at school:

*[...] at the school, from what I can remember, there was no training. There were some discussions at the HTPC, which was the management part (principal and pedagogical coordinator) and then there was something that was sent by the Secretariat that had to be discussed with us (P2/E).*

*The MDE sends what there is to be worked, they [are] not the ones who create. [...], it is the MDE that sends to the school what has to be worked with teachers, many times they do not meet our needs (P3/E).*

*The actions developed by the school's management team are usually more informative. And, in some moments reflective (P10/Q).*

*Then the HTPC are meetings that we have at school with the management team. They inform the teachers about the instructions received from the education secretariat (P10/E).*

For some beginning teachers, during the Collective Pedagogical Work Hour (HTPC) – which took place every two months for all the teachers and, therefore, not just for beginners – they received information from the MDE. On other occasions, when other training initiatives took place in the HTPC, according to field data, their content was not defined with the participation of beginning teachers, so, to a certain extent, they did not cater for their specific demands.

This procedure contradicts studies that indicate the importance of continued training that meets the requirements of beginning teachers, starting from their practical needs, and then establishing theoretical relationships to support their reflections (Leone, 2011).

It seems relevant to emphasize that informative moments on administrative issues or even moments in which the MDE wants to discuss certain pedagogical proposals for the education network with teachers are important for teachers, including beginners, as these are demands from the education network where they work. However, training initiatives cannot be restricted to this, as they need to include collaborative and reflective activities that promote the improvement of those teachers' professional learning and pedagogical practice (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012), especially beginners, also based on what they perceive and indicate as a need.

### 3.1.2 Education actions originated from the beginning teachers: sharing experiences with experienced teachers

Going beyond initiatives directly linked to the MDE or even to the school's management team, beginning teachers also presented some initiatives – with great educational potential – and reported them as follows:

*What I learned was kind of by myself, at the beginning of next year, and with the help of more experienced colleagues [...] (P1/Q).*

*I used to go for it [...] ask questions. It was quite informal. I would go on Fridays, when we have the HTPC the whole afternoon, [...] I would sit there... start to ask. It was quite good! (P1/E).*

*[...] this exchange of experience... we usually comment either in the coffee break or in our own HTPC [...]. These moments, we consider education. Even because we discuss certain themes [...] (P2/E).*

*[...] in the 15 minutes of the coffee break, at the end of the lunch time [...] a doubt appears. Since most of the teachers are there [...]. The first grade's teacher gets involved, and so does the fifth grade's teacher, and then, experiences are shared. [...] Sometimes, during the HTPC, I see the teacher doing an activity [...] then I ask to take a look, or ask her to explain that to me...(P5/E).*

*Positive points: when talking to the other teachers that participate, new ideas emerge (P5/Q).*

*[...] what has been helping me and contributing to my improvement in the classroom, is the support of more experienced teachers [...] (P7/Q).*

The participating teachers drew attention to what they do to minimize their doubts and, with this, move towards improving professional knowledge and, consequently, pedagogical practice. The reports focused on the experience sharing between them and more experienced teachers and highlighted that it happened informally, in the school corridors and during coffee breaks. Exchanges of ideas carried out during the *HTPC* provided by the school were also reported.

Such sharing (educational, in a broad sense) allowed teachers to think about their own pedagogical work, comparing it with that of other teachers, establishing relationships and modifying it, if they deemed necessary, since from them “new ideas emerge” (P5/Q), as highlighted by one of the teachers.

The literature has shown that support from more experienced teachers is important for beginners (Giordan; Hobold; Gabardo, 2018); however, to optimize its benefits, it needs to be institutionalized in the school, so that well-defined times and spaces provide beginning teachers with collaborative

processes as principles of professional learning (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012). Possibly due to this characteristic of meeting specific needs, exchanges with more experienced teachers have been identified as interesting professional learning opportunities for beginners, therefore, contributing to their teaching practice.

### 3.1.3 Flaws in the continuous education provided by the MDE

Considering the reflections enabled by this study, field data revealed some flaws related to the continuous education offered by the MDE as reported by the participants. Such flaws are discussed below:

#### 3.1.3.1 Unfavorable perception by the beginning teachers of the use of their HTPC as education time/space

One of the aspects emphasized by the teachers was the difficulty caused by their participation in educational activities using the time destined to the HTPC:

*The lack of time to take part in teachers' trainings is also a problem, for example, if I have two courses to take during the week, depending on the time, I can't, because they do not match my HTPC. [...]. When we attend courses, they are equivalent to the HTPC (P2/E).*

*At least beginning teachers, who are still adjusting, should not have training during their HTPC [...] we need time to plan a good lesson, to attract [students]. Currently, it is very difficult to get your students' attention in the classroom. Then, we need this time to plan how to do it (P7/E).*

*Meetings are held on schooldays and the workload is considered HTPC, then, teachers usually have no time to plan their lessons in the training week (P8/E).*

The beginning teachers' use of HTPC time to take part in external education actions makes it difficult for them to participate, since they need to use that time to plan their lessons, so that they become more interesting for the students.

One of the supervisors clarified the MDE understanding of the convenience of using the HTPC for teachers' education purposes:

*[...] HTPC. One third of the municipal network teachers' workload is for HTPC, then that time is to be used in educational processes [...]. (SG1).*

Difficulties with planning and the teaching relationship to be established with students in the classroom are aspects that, in this study, were highlighted as challenging by beginning teachers, which explains their opposition to the use of the HTPC to participate in other initiatives, as they would have no other time to meet such demands which, in this case, are priorities and require greater



effort, precisely because they are beginners. The difficulty faced by beginning teachers in relation to planning, including lack of time, is an aspect already highlighted in classic studies on teacher training, such as those by Veenman (1984 apud Imbernón, 1998).

The MDE seems to find itself in a conflict situation regarding this issue, since the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, Law nº 9394/1996 (Brazil, 1996), ensures, in article 67, item V, that teachers have a “[...] period reserved for studies, planning and evaluation, included in the workload”. In this sense, although the proposition of using the HTPC for other training activities – including those offered outside the school – by the MDE appears to be appropriate, it also seems to be coherent that, in the case of beginning teachers, this aspect can be rethought or reorganized, with a view to meeting the specific needs of those teachers.

### **3.1.3.2 MDE disregard of specific education needs felt by beginning teachers**

Regarding the continuous development content offered to beginners, some excerpts are quite illustrative:

*Having courses focusing on the teachers' needs, start from the teachers' needs and then elaborate the courses (P2/E).*

*They should listen to the teachers more often, mainly those that are starting (P3/E).*

*The themes addressed in the education initiatives should be originated in the teachers' classroom (P14/Q).*

In the records put forward by teachers, some terms were significant because they indicated gaps such as meeting their needs; listening to teachers effectively; and approaching themes that are interesting for them. They expressed that these aspects were not considered in the training actions proposed by the MDE, which compromises their effectiveness and the achievement of more favorable results for the beginning teachers' learning.

This finding contrasts with what was pointed out by the MDE teaching and education management supervisors, when they stated:

*In the continuous development, there are Workers called Pedagogical Advisors. They provide pedagogical advice [...]. Each MDE pedagogical advisor is in charge of 6 to 8 schools. The pedagogical advisor provides direct communication between the school and the MDE [...]. In this tutorial, [...] they verify when teachers and coordinators find it very difficult to work with certain contente/topic, for example, text production, then we get this information. From this contact we offer training in the areas that are having difficulties inside the schools (SG1).*

*The technical team usually addresses topics that are more necessary to be worked (SG2).*

According to the supervisors, teachers' training needs should be informed to the MDE by pedagogical advisors, who monitor a pre-defined group of schools. However, it is possible that some difficulties have hampered this process, since, in relation to beginning teachers, we could notice that they did not feel involved in the process of meeting their demands, which requires new and different actions from the MDE.

The literature indicates that adults take more advantage of the learning process when they can contribute to the planning of their learning, that is, when they start with what they miss, thus bringing an interest in learning.

As pointed out by Vaillant and Marcelo (2012, p. 40) about adult learning, "the training and learning of adults requires taking into account direct work experience as a starting point, as a component to be incorporated, in short, as a training element". For the same authors, however, meeting this demand in the continuous education processes of beginning teachers has proven to be a gap, as also demonstrated by André (2013) and Sousa et al. (2020).

### 3.1.3.3 A more theoretical than practical education

The practice and theory relationship issue in teachers' education processes has been discussed for a long time, trying to establish that a proximity relationship should be considered in these processes. However, very often, this has been seen to be an obstacle for educators in the education process, as verified in some reports:

*The training should be more constant, and include the whole network structure and how to work it (P1/Q).*

*A lot of the theory requires more examples of practical activities (P3/E).*

*In education initiatives, there should be more practice and less talking about. They talk a lot, avoid critical topics, play some music, etc. I know it is necessary, but there are times you want something else, for example, concrete activities (P5/E).*

*Because there are things, that in theory everything is beautiful, but you cannot put into practice. Because there are many realities. Like in the school where I teach, it is a very needy community. Then, it is very difficult to put things into practice, do certain things [...] (P7/E).*

*[...] a more practical training, for example, think together, elaborate the plan together...(P10/E).*

*Many times, it is not objective, they need more practical things, things that help in the everyday routine (P13/Q).*

The participants emphasized the importance of having the opportunity to discuss and reflect upon their teaching practice based on their own needs, as well as on teaching planning and methodologies to be developed with students,

in the continuous education provided by the MDE. However, this must certainly occur without teachers developing a restricted and essentially technical conception of teaching (Vaillant; Marcelo, 2012).

Having continuous training focused on the teacher's pedagogical practice is characterized as a demand during the period of initiation into teaching, which needs to be considered by the MDE and school management teams, favoring a greater possibility for beginning teachers to move forward in their careers and in their professional learning.

The observation of little practical-theoretical relationship in the continuous training actions provided by the MDE to beginning teachers reaffirms the drawback also demonstrated by Nascimento and Reis (2017), and requires that education management bodies at the level of education systems be attentive to the quality of the assessment of these needs.

It is certainly not a question of disregarding theory in the training process, but of making it support teachers' practical actions and decisions in an articulated way. This means making it capable of "removing the common pedagogical meaning, to restore the balance between the practical and theoretical schemes that support the educational practice" (Imbernón, 2011, p. 61).

### **3.1.3.4 Lack of continuous development destined specifically to beginning teachers**

The beginning teachers reports demonstrated few education actions specifically designed to cater for their needs, as observed in some excerpts:

*There is a lack of courses discussing the "beginning teacher" theme with practical examples, since in the classes we teach, many times we cannot adapt some practices seen in the undergraduate course due to lack of experience (P2/Q).*

*The continuous education must be for all beginning teachers [...] (P7/Q).*

*A suggestion would be to provide specific training for beginning teachers, improving their professional education (P8/Q).*

*The training is destined to all teacher from the school; however, little has been destined specifically to beginning teachers (P15/Q).*

The data indicated that the specific education initiatives for beginning teachers were scarce, even in the school environment, which remains a flaw in the continuous development of those teachers and contradicts the report by the teaching and education management supervisors.

The predominant continuous training is the one offered to all teachers – except for some initial meetings that were reported by the participants and one of the supervisors (SG1) – but which were more informative in nature. The need for the creation of a professional onboarding program for beginning teachers in the municipal network was also expressed. Its educational activities should be effectively dedicated to them.

The research findings reinforce Marcelo's (2008, p. 55, our translation) concern that “[...] we cannot continue ignoring that there is a clearly differentiated phase in the process of becoming a good teacher, which has its own characteristics and needs [...]”, referring to the beginning of the teacher's career.

### 3.1.4 Contributions of the continuous education provided by the MDE

The research data that originated this category of analysis demonstrated that, in addition to the flaws in the continuous education provided by the MDE, the teachers also highlighted points that contributed to their training and consequent professional learning:

*Every time you go to a course, you learn something different. Training doesn't stop, regardless of whether it was meaningful to you or not. You have that knowledge from that moment. Whether or not you use it in the classroom is up to you. But they are providing knowledge. Even if it's sometimes not 100% (P4/E).*

*I believe that you end up with some learning, I wouldn't say 100%, but you can always take advantage of something (P5/E).*

*Many times, the meetings in which there is exchange of teaching practices, there is a significant contribution to the teachers' education (P10/Q).*

*In a training course I took part, there was a collective exchange of experiences among the teachers. [...]. This kind of sharing add to the teachers' learning (P10/E).*

The participants indicated that, when participating in the continuous education initiatives promoted by the MDE, in some way, they learned, because, even if it was not specifically aimed at beginners, they believed that some aspects contributed to their pedagogical practice.

Beginning teachers demonstrated openness to new learning when they valued that, even if not completely, they benefited from the courses offered. They also highlighted that all training promotes learning, even if it could occur in a more satisfactory way. In fact, for André (2013, p. 44), “continuous training processes constitute an important form of support for the teaching work”, especially when referring to beginning teachers.

It is also worth highlighting the impact caused by “the collective exchange of experience between teachers” (P10), or the “exchange of pedagogical practices” (P10/Q) at some moments during the training provided by the education network, as indicated by the participants, which may have been important for beginners to take over their role more confidently.

Other contributions were related to the field of practice, especially when it comes to teaching methodologies, or “how to approach certain topics” (P2), including training activities carried out online, as highlighted in the examples:

*In general, teachers' training cooperates to the improvement of our practice, since there are some events that present concrete practices of how to approach certain topics. Showing us methodologies for this work (P2/Q).*

*[..] All courses aggregate something that you can put into practice (P2/E).*

*Of course, I leave the training with ideas that help me [...] (P5/E).*

*Positive Points: online course, well designed, approaching specific classroom issues, demonstrative videos (P9/Q).*

*The training is productive since it gives you some ideas, helps you to think that there are greater possibilities for certain content (P10/E).*

*The continuous training is na opportunity to guide teachers in their teaching practice (P14/Q).*

The reports indicated that when beginning teachers had contact with new possibilities of teaching practices aimed at teaching curricular content to students, they began to make changes, whenever they thought they should, to their own practices, and, with this, they envisaged new ways of understanding the teaching-learning process.

Possibly for this reason, the participants indicated some specific moments, or "some training" (P2/Q), as contributing to their professional learning, when they had such a possibility in the continuous training, in the same way that they were more resistant when the training was restricted to theoretical studies. Veenman (1984 apud Imbernón, 1998) had already highlighted the mastery of different teaching methods as one of the problems faced by beginning teachers, which therefore indicates the need for constant attention to this issue.

It seems relevant to highlight the positive emphasis on online courses also linked to the teaching practice issues, an aspect provided for in the Curricular References for the initial years of elementary education (Ponta Grossa, 2020) and which, according to some participants, contribute to minimizing the difficulty felt in relation to the availability of time to participate in continuous education activities.

Vaillant and Marcelo (2012, p. 81) emphasized that the traditional thought is "[...] training in terms of physical spaces. However, learning situations are increasingly mixed in both physical and virtual contexts". For those authors, however, in any of the possibilities, the individuals being trained must be assisted in such a way that the space in which they "[...] act, interact and learn [...] is considered", always using tools that facilitate learning.

In the case of this study, the use of videos, the connection with the classroom and the perception that the course is "well designed" (P9/Q), seemed to have been decisive for the favorable perception of this training initiative by beginning teachers.



#### 4. Final Considerations

This article proposed an analysis of the contributions and flaws of the continuous training of beginning teachers, as provided by the MDE in a municipality in Paraná in the southern Brazil. To achieve such aim, it sought to identify training initiatives aimed at beginning teachers and verify which actions favored, or not, the professional learning of those teachers.

The participant beginning teachers reported that there were training actions initiated by the MDE and carried out directly by that institution – such as the courses carried out by its internal teams – and other courses offered in partnership with different institutions, in view of the development of the school curriculum. There were also initiatives carried out by the school, therefore directly linked to the school management team: pedagogical coordinators and school directors.

The MDE offered some meetings aimed at beginning teachers in the network, but they were limited and of a more informative nature, specifically dealing with organizational issues in the education network. In schools, there were some reports about studies and guidance for teachers, as well as in certain cases, more specific attention focused on beginners – which allowed some to feel welcomed – although such initiatives seemed to be more subject to availability and goodwill from the school management team, which deserves some inspection by the MDE.

There was also an indication of initiatives by the beginning teachers themselves, but those were limited to conversations about the teaching practice with more experienced teachers, which took place predominantly on informal occasions.

Regarding the flaws and contributions of the continuous training provided by the MDE, especially with regard to weaknesses, there was a less than favorable perception, on the part of beginning teachers, of the use of HTPC for participation in training courses; little consideration of the needs of beginning teachers in the training actions; overlap of theory over practice in continuous education; and the scarcity of training specifically aimed at beginners.

Considering contributions, the participants highlighted that, in the more specific continuous education actions, some level of learning took place, and that the moments in which exchanges of experiences were provided between teachers in the training actions of the municipal network, this was fruitful, which suggests that this is a favorable possibility for learning and improving the beginning teachers' teaching practice. Given these results, the limiting aspects of continuous education indicated overcame the positive aspects.

In this context, it is important to highlight that the MDE has demonstrated that it recognizes the professional status of beginning teachers as different from other teachers in the municipal network, given that they are mentioned in the MDE guiding document within the scope of the continuous education of teachers and that they were offered some meetings (even if of a more informative nature) to discuss the functioning of the municipal network.

However, this conception needs to be broadened, in the sense that those teachers' specific training needs are better considered, as well as the

importance of more attentive monitoring of these teachers to be carried out by schools, thereby expanding the actions to be developed by the MDE.

Therefore, some expectation is raised that a structured program for the onboarding of beginning teachers will be implemented as part of the continuous development Policy by the Municipal Department of Education, a program that includes informational, training and monitoring or mentoring actions.

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