

RESEARCH ARTICLE



Being a “Mentor”: A Study on the Contributions of Experienced Teachers to the Development of Beginning Teachers

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Abstract: In this text, we address issues related to the beginning of the teaching career, exploring mentoring as an important support in this initial phase of teaching practice. Understanding the relevance of the process of initiation to the teaching profession, we seek to emphasize the relationship between experienced teachers and beginners, considering the involvement between these professionals as a valuable way to overcome the adversities of this initial moment. The research is methodologically based on narratives and multiple case studies, bringing the experiences of a group of nine teachers working in early childhood education in a city in the interior of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil (a country that does not have a national professional teaching induction program and has few local initiatives of this type), and from them, we seek to reflect and dialogue with some authors who discuss the theme, among them, Marcelo, Nóvoa, and Realí et al.. In this way, we show that the relationships built between experienced and novice teachers were vital for their permanence in the profession and contributed immensely to their professional development, even in the absence of a formal and official mentoring program.

Keywords: beginning of the teaching career, mentoring, narratives, experienced teachers, beginning teachers

1. Introduction

Teaching has its own characteristics. Anyone who thinks that going through an initial education course means being fully prepared to assume all the demands and responsibilities of the profession is wrong. From this perspective, being a teacher is a constant process of formation, whether in university spaces, in daily work, or in the lived experiences in a classroom. It is audacious to say that, no matter how well a teacher is theoretically prepared, this knowledge will not be enough to assume its practical context, the school space, the classroom, because experience will enable a better understanding and application of this theoretical knowledge in practice.

In this context, some phrases of professors become routine, such as “theory is one thing, when it comes to practice, it is totally different.” However, we criticize such phrases, as they are attributing a certain uselessness to what is offered in education courses and because there is a missing link in this process that could unite the education space to the space where the profession takes place. The epigraph that begins this work highlights the relevance of both contexts. Thus, in this process, there is no better or worse knowledge than the other, but the urgency of a deep relationship between universities and school contexts, because practice is also a determining factor for solid education.

It is with this in mind that the importance of the presence of teachers who are working day by day in schools, in the education of beginning educators, stands out. These professionals experience the entire teaching and learning process, the relationships that are built along this path, the difficulties; in short, they are in the daily life of the profession and go through experiences that need to be shared and constantly rethought. Nóvoa considers [1]:

Today, due to the universitization process, we are faced with a strange situation: basic education teachers do not have an effective presence in teaching courses. However, it is not possible to train a teacher of basic education without the presence and experience of other teachers of basic education. If we do not understand this, we will not be able to find a way out of the crisis in teacher education institutions and, even worse, we will not be able to overcome the current weaknesses of the profession.

The absence of this relationship is evidenced when the individual leaves the education space, his student position, and assumes his professional experience. When entering the profession, the beginning teacher is lost in an unknown environment, since, at that moment, in that place, they must assume other responsibilities. According to Marcelo and López Ferreira [2]:

The induction of beginning teachers into teaching has been a topic of educational research for decades. Research has shown that beginning teachers face specific challenges in their early years that tend to remain consistent over time.

Therefore, these circumstances, added to the lack of support policies for beginning teachers in Brazil and the absence of a

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partnership between universities and schools, lead to high dropout rates in the teaching profession [3]. This is because professional induction – a concept used, above all, to characterize the initial phase of teaching work, such as beginning or beginning teachers – presents difficult situations, which beginning teachers seek to overcome but do not always find alternatives that can help them to remain in the profession. What can be seen is that “it is necessary to ‘take care’ of the insertion of the beginning teacher”; after all, numerous factors affect the development of this professional [4].

Given this fact, induction programs have been implemented in several countries as a support for beginning teachers, after completing their initial education and their first contact as a teacher in a school. However, this is not the reality in Brazil. What is still happening in the country is the absence of this support, in which few actions are carried out and expanded, considering this moment of the profession [3].

For clarification purposes, initial teacher education in Brazil for primary school and early childhood education is provided at a preferential higher education level, although secondary-level professional education is still permitted for these levels of education [5]. This further demonstrates the difficulties of achieving quality education for teachers, which is often compounded by precarious internships during education and the absence of a mandatory professional teacher induction policy, with only a few pilot institutional programs for professional teacher induction and mentoring existing.

In view of the above, what paths do beginning teachers persistently find to pursue a professional career in teaching? This concern was generated based on the experience of one of the authors of this article, a novice teacher, when experiencing the beginning of her teaching career in a school in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. Despite not having a formal induction program, at the institution, the teacher author of this article found the support to continue in the profession in the experienced teachers who existed at the school where the author started teaching. The actions of these professionals were similar to those of a mentor – term commonly used to identify those teachers with experience, who guide and prepare beginning teachers, who help them to adapt in the early years, who efficiently develop the teaching practice and have a good relationship with the other teachers [2] – as they accompanied the teacher and were fundamental for her to follow her path in the profession.

Consequently, in this paper, we sought to address the relevance of mentoring in the processes of professional teacher induction, considering experienced teachers as indispensable for the professional development of beginning teachers. Therefore, the objective of this research was to know the career paths of the teachers at this school, in an attempt to understand the process of initiation of these professionals. We also observed whether they received the support of experienced teachers and whether this support helped them face the challenges of the initial phase and develop as professionals.

2. Contributions to the Professional Development of Experienced and Beginning Teachers: An Association with Mentoring

Considering the relevance of the beginning of the teaching career and the challenges and difficulties that exist in this initiation process, it was possible to identify the need for programs and actions designed and developed so that each teacher has the ability to overcome the initial phase of teaching and develop as a professional teacher.

Wilson [6] describes that “Informal induction occurs outside of the structure and mandatory nature of the formal induction process and can include experiences such as speaking with colleagues or a new teacher finding a trusted companion in their building. The induction process is most often tailored for teachers who are beginning their careers in education,” although a review of informal induction revealed limited research on the topic. The author also highlights the positive effects of informal mentorship and explains that “Mentorship, as both an informal and formal experience, is a process in which novice educators are matched with an experienced educator as a means of developing a supportive professional development network operationalized within the school itself.”

So, this part of this paper is dedicated to the perspective of support related to mentoring¹, as, according to Marcelo and López Ferreira [2]. In this process, the mentor appears as a valuable aid, being able to help the beginning teacher in several aspects, from socialization to the teaching process, even in informal professional induction.

Beginning teachers are being suddenly “thrown” into the school context, adhering to a reality without considering the particularities of the initial phase of the profession. This condition exposes the weaknesses of education and school contexts in which the profession takes place. However, mentoring has revealed itself as a possible “remedy or antidote” for the induction process. Experienced teachers can collaborate a lot. They are part of the professional routine and are fundamental pieces for adaptation in the early years of the teaching career. This is because “experience favors the construction of situated knowledge, which is developed according to the contexts of action” [3].

In this work, experienced teachers, who help beginning teachers, even if they are not part of specific professional induction programs, are considered true mentors. Therefore, in addition to valuing the experience of these professionals and emphasizing their relevance for the development of beginning teachers, it is also necessary to reflect on the professional path of such teachers that will influence the education of new teachers.

From this support perspective, it is not enough just to have years in the profession to be considered an experienced teacher capable of offering fundamental assistance to beginners at the beginning of the profession. Nóvoa [1, 8] confirms that experience, considered in some circumstances only as the time spent in the profession, will not make this teacher qualified to exercise a position in the education of new teachers. It will be the actions developed by him throughout his life in the profession, indicating that the true meaning of this work goes to those who have the “best practice.” With this, it is observed that mentoring involves learning that supports the professional development of individuals from day one.

This conception proposes that mentors should obtain education to perform this function. As much as they have experience in the profession, it is necessary to take care of this knowledge so that, when exercising this work with beginners, experienced teachers are able to provide support in various aspects, whether emotional or procedural, without failing to reflect on what they teach, as this is an essential characteristic of teaching.

What favors the creation of a mutual learning environment, while offering support and teaching, the mentor is also included in this dynamic, as he is open to exchange situations to, together, think about what is experienced in the profession. Mentoring, therefore, goes beyond providing support or assistance to the beginning

¹Monitoring of beginning teachers by trained and experienced teachers [7].

teacher, but it is an occasion for experienced teachers to continue to develop professionally [9–12].

In order to achieve this perspective of work and learning, Marcelo and López Ferreira [2] suggest that:

The most notable role, due to its significant impact on new teachers, is the mentor or coach. A mentor is a teacher with greater teaching experience, education capacity, and motivation to support new teachers [. . .] Mentors support new teachers through collaborative planning, classroom observation, feedback, and the proposal of improvement plans. The effects of mentoring on beginning teachers are varied: teaching effectiveness; commitment; well-being; and improved teaching practice.

This concept of support is anchored in the characteristics of these professionals, as they are the ones who will directly influence the formation of new teachers, as well as the unfolding of this process, which may or may not occur satisfactorily.

Therefore, this interaction between experienced teachers and beginners is configured as a facilitator for overcoming the difficulties characteristic of this initial phase. Because at this difficult stage, at the beginning of a career, when many professionals decide to leave the profession, the need for a supportive framework that promotes exchange, continued engagement, and professional development becomes evident.

Constant contact and dialogue help these new teachers to break the isolation and feel part of the school community, creating affective bonds that drive them to continue. From this interaction, beginning teachers feel more comfortable to expose their doubts, difficulties, and uncertainties. In this sense, the relationship between mentors and beginners that does not have an evaluative character will further favor the dialogue between these professionals, as it will constitute a process in which mentoring implies support, help, and guidance of the beginning teacher [3].

Rabelo [3], when analyzing the actions aimed at induction, refers to the evaluation of the beginning teacher in this context from two perspectives. The author states that the importance of this strategy lies in observing whether the new professors have acquired the necessary knowledge to perform their function. On the other hand, she clarifies that this should not be a position taken by the mentor, especially if the evaluation affects the continuation in the profession (such as evaluation of the probationary stage or others). The existence of a closer relationship between beginning teachers and mentors is not possible when the latter are destined to evaluate the former.

Mentoring, still, should not be seen as a mere mechanism of reproduction, as if, along the way, experienced teachers showed a single way of being and acting, transforming new teachers into mere copies, transferring to them the same practices, based on imitation. On the contrary, it is argued that this perspective is established in a broad support that will start from experience and will offer the means for the beginning teacher to be able to overcome the adversities of the initiation process. With this, they will develop their own way of proceeding, acquiring with this interaction the knowledge that will favor their autonomy and the construction of their professional identity.

Finally, it is clear that experienced teachers and beginning teachers grow together in this mentoring path. Experience, therefore, favors the constant reflection of experienced and beginner teachers, as they seek in the situations they experience to reassess their practices and improve them with the needs that are exposed daily in the reality of the profession.

3. The Research Methodology

The research is methodologically based on narratives and multiple case studies, bringing the experiences of a group of nine

teachers working in early childhood education in a city in the interior of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil. The research had the participation of nine teachers working in early childhood education, six experienced teachers (whom we consider close to the figure of the mentor), and three beginning teachers (the mentees), as described in the Table 1. The Maria das Flores Municipal School², chosen to carry out the research, offers, in addition to early childhood education, the primary education and youth and adult education. However, the work was developed with early childhood education because it is the context of the researcher and beginning teacher, Where the beginning teacher lived the involvement with the experienced group, even in the absence of a formal and official mentoring program.

This school institution is located in a municipality in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro, with an estimated population of 7,206 inhabitants, being the only school in the urban area intended to serve the aforementioned public (infant education-preschool and the primary school). Education and health are prominent sectors in the municipality; in particular, considering the educational context, the municipality achieved important advances in the IDEB (Basic Education Development Index) in 2017, being ranked 1st in the North and Northwest Fluminense regions and 2nd place in the state of Rio de Janeiro [13]. In 2019, it remained in the spotlight, ranking 4th across the state and 2nd in the Northwest Fluminense region [14].

In order to know the path taken by the participating teachers who make up this teaching network, an in-depth semi-structured interview was carried out, according to the following aspect: “a widely used method in qualitative research aimed at building a depth of understanding, rather than factual or abstract information” [15]. Through the interviews, the teachers rescued their memories and expressed their narratives, revealing their stories, which, according to Rabelo [16], agrees with what Benjamin says, “The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others [. . .]” [16].

Therefore, we infer that this research has a qualitative approach, since in this context cited by Silverman [17]. To start the interviews, it was initially necessary to present the research proposal to the school principal and inform the need for contact and participation of teachers working in early childhood education. After the release, individual contact with all professors at the school was initiated (all kindergarten teachers at the school participated, without a sample). This process was carried out via telephone call, and the Free and Informed Consent Term was sent via email to be completed by the participants. Although they are in daily contact at the same place of work, this process was carried out by phone and email because we are experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, so all teachers were away from the school environment, performing work through remote teaching.

All promptly responded to the request for participation, and appointments were made for the interviews, which took place via telephone call, according to the availability of each of them, and the conversations were recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The entire process was fundamental to the investigation.

The narratives brought the motivations of these professionals, the way they constituted themselves professionally, and valuable experiences were shared. The involvement of these teachers, in addition to contributing richly to the reflections developed in this research, allowed them to revisit their own path, not only in a descriptive way, merely bringing the facts that occurred along this path, but also reconstituting a trajectory with a critical eye, giving new meaning to the events, which is essential for professional growth.

²Fictitious name given to the school involved in the research.

Table 1
General information of the participating teachers

Teachers	Age	Time in the profession	Teacher education course type ⁴
Bárbara	36 years old	4 years	Normal course at secondary level/Degree in Pedagogy
Eva	37 years old	16 years	Higher Normal Course/Degree in Pedagogy
Fernanda	37 years old	15 years	Normal course at secondary level
Jéssica	39 years old	14 years	Normal course at secondary level/Higher Normal Course
Júlia	39 years old	16 years	Normal course at secondary level/Degree in Pedagogy
Manuela	41 years old	3 years	Degree in Pedagogy
Maria	31 years old	4 years	Normal course at secondary level/Degree in Pedagogy
Mônica	28 years old	8 years	Normal course at secondary level
Rafaela	31 years old	10 years	Higher Normal Course

The reliability of the study results in this qualitative study lies in credibility because the data collected are representative of the phenomenon under study in this school because it included all the teachers there, in participant validation or member verification, in transferability achieved by a “thick description” of the results from various data collection methods, in the applicability of the results to similar contexts or individuals, in reliability because it was approved by the UFF ethics committee and informed-consent statements, and in confirmability through practitioner reflexivity to confront potential personal biases.

4. Results

As predicted and previously informed, the research had the participation of nine teachers from a municipal public school, including both beginners and experienced teachers. These teachers work daily in the context of early childhood education; however, it is not the only segment of activity. There are teachers who, in addition to early childhood education, also perform the function in the primary school. Thus, the process of professional induction of these teachers was not experienced exclusively in early childhood education; some went through this phase in the primary school.

According to the information presented in the interviews, all the professors have higher education; however, there are professors who do not have this education in their area of expertise, as the higher education course refers to another stage or area.

We list in the table below some information about the teachers³ involved in the research, who work in the first stage of basic education, in the educational institution involved in this study.

The narratives of these teachers were essential to understand in great detail the professional education, the induction process, and the experiences lived throughout the profession. All participants felt comfortable during the interviews, considering the environment to be that of an informal conversation, a situation possibly generated by the fact that the researcher was part of the study group.

In their interviews, they revealed important contributions from experienced teachers, reinforcing the relevance of this support and

exposing actions that were fundamental for the development of each professional. We also affirm that in the early years of their careers, all teachers received the help of an experienced teacher; however, this was not provided through induction programs but through voluntary actions of already experienced professionals. However, in their narratives, they showed how welcoming, affection, and support built partnership relationships that led to learning and professional growth.

5. Findings Section – The Beginning of the Teaching Career and the Support of Experienced Teachers: What the Narratives Reveal

The professional trajectory explains a lot about each teacher. It is on this path that he is constituted, experiencing experiences, building his way of being, and manifesting his professional identity and socialization. So the construction of the self through work activity demonstrates how this path is formative [18].

Considering the relevance of the beginning of the career and the particularities of this initial moment, which influence the permanence and development in the profession, the relationship between experienced teachers and beginning teachers was examined, focusing on the support that these professionals, who have already overcome the initial challenges of teaching, can offer to those who are starting their careers. Therefore, we sought to know and observe the process of professional insertion of a group of teachers working in early childhood education, glimpsing the role of the experienced teacher, and this professional can represent the figure of a mentor in this context.

This attribution is revealed by identifying the availability of experienced teachers to collaborate in the education of their peers, offering support in several aspects at the beginning of their careers. Furthermore, they are teachers who have competence, responsibility, continuous education, and recognition in their teaching practice.

In order to exemplify the relevance of this investigation, it is illustrated with the narrative of teacher Júlia, already experienced, when asked about the difficulties she encountered in the process of initiation to teaching:

I had no idea, I had a very big conflict. There were 2 teachers in each class, in each year of early childhood education. And the companion who was with me, she didn't help me at all, the first day there she already knew, because she worked in a private school and I had no idea. So she started making plans, the planning for the first week she did, and within that I was trying to do mine. One day the director came to me and asked

³Fictitious names given to the teachers involved in the research.

⁴ Brazil have three teacher education course types, namely: (1) Pedagogy Course, which forms Pedagogues – who are education specialists and who, most recently, have also been working as teachers; (2) Higher Normal Course (CNS – “Curso Normal superior”), which are aimed at educate primary and early childhood teachers at higher education level; and (3) Normal Course, aimed at educate primary and secondary education teachers at secondary education level [5].

why I wasn't doing certain things, if the other one was. She said "the girl with the balloon, the girl with the lollipop and what's going on? Don't you have conditions? Do you need help?" No, because I'm not aware of what she's doing. She did not share her ideas with me [. .].

The interviewed teacher exposed her inexperience and the expectation of finding support from her co-worker, for being an already experienced professional. However, a context of total helplessness was evidenced both by the school institution, for not presenting actions that could collaborate with the process of insertion of beginning teachers, and by the experienced teacher.

Júlia continued and referred to a second experience, in the second year as a teacher:

After this teacher, this horrible experience, I went to work with another teacher, so this one helped me, she helped me a lot. If she saw that I was going to a side that didn't match, she would pull me, "no, come here, let's do it this way" [. .]. She supported me a lot, taught me a lot, we exchanged.

It was noted, in the educator's narrative, that experienced teachers have a prominent role. When examining the speech of this teacher, it was concluded that the presence of experienced teachers willing to contribute and offer support to beginners helps their education and presents itself as an important aid to support and overcome the uncertainties of this phase of professional induction.

Entering the career brings circumstances that until then seemed familiar. However, when integrating the practical context of action, an even greater dimension is observed, and what seemed so well known is no longer so. This causes doubts and a feeling of not belonging, which is why Shanks [19] highlights:

New teachers can be regarded as being on the periphery of a community of practice when they begin their teaching career. They need the opportunity to move into various communities of practice during their first year/s as a teacher so that they can learn how to be a teacher.

Teacher Maria reinforced this point in her narrative, recalling the contribution of experienced teachers:

As much as we have knowledge, when we arrive in an environment, we don't know how it works [. .]. There are always teachers who help, who give information.

According to what the beginning teacher Maria explained, the education that the teacher acquires in his initial course will not be enough for the profession, agreeing with the data presented by OECD [20]. This is because, when arriving at the school environment, he will still face challenges, demanding to feel inserted to, little by little, find himself in this practical context, in a sense of belonging. And, for that, she highlighted the collaboration of the professors who are already in the institution, acting on a daily basis, as points of support that can help in the understanding of this workplace. Shanks' [19, 21] approach to micropolitical literacy meets this perspective and confirms the importance of this learning for beginning teachers. They are led to an understanding of the relationships and conflicts that surround this new environment, of which they seek to be a part:

It is important to understand the social context that new teachers are working in as well as how they adapt or do not adapt. In order to retain new teachers in the profession it is important to encourage and sustain new teachers by enabling them to recognise micro-politics in the workplace and learn how to handle them through the development of micro-political literacy as one part of their professional learning.

Teacher Manuela recalled how the reception and union of experienced teachers helped her to break through the barriers that came

to light when taking on a class in early childhood education and occupying this practical context:

I think that when I arrived at school, meeting these two experienced teachers, sharing this pre-II with them, it was just me getting on that path they were going, wanting to learn, following that path. They had a lot to offer me, they welcomed me, I think this welcome was essential for me, this arm, this willingness to help, to say, "Shall we do this?" and doing together, this doing together, you know, this freedom they gave me to act together, not to leave me behind. Do you know what one person is on the side and the other on the other, let's go together? You are now part of this team and I felt welcomed, I felt as if I was already part of the family, even though I had just arrived, so I felt really inserted in that class, in early childhood education, in that segment that we were. This was essential to overcome this challenge of planning in early childhood education, and the experience, day to day, practice, care for children, children's routine [. .].

The value of these actions is unquestionable, of being part of, of feeling inserted in this practical community, exposing the attitudes necessary for the arrival of this beginner teacher to the work context. The school, as a space for the exchange of experiences, needs to be open, welcoming, and committed to encouraging within its community a caring and collaborative approach toward those who are entering the profession. Going beyond hierarchical relationships and leading bonds of sharing crosses individual growth and moves toward an effective learning context. According to Papi and Martins [22], "It is about collaboration between professionals for joint learning, which, in addition to favoring individual professional advances and the set of teachers, also favors the improvement of the school as this institution aimed at achieving common goals."

It is important to highlight that this scenario causes a contribution beyond didactic knowledge, also reaching personal relationships, since beginner teachers can be or feel isolated in centers where most teachers have teaching experience [2].

One aspect of this support perspective, with the presence of experienced teachers in a mentoring relationship, is "working on practices, knowing how to do it." This situation is common among beginning teachers who arrive in the school context full of theories but still do not have the knowledge to transform them into the practical dimension. Teacher Barbara's narrative indicated how this occurred at the beginning of her career and how she, as a beginner, still had the opportunity to contribute to another companion, who was also entering the profession, revealing peer support:

It was like this, the experiences that the colleagues had at the time of the conversation, the exchange of ideas, "do what is important," I am having difficulty, "let's work like this," "no, this is the way," this exchange of experience is important. I see how necessary this is, like our colleague Maria, she took over, came to me and said, "I never took over the class, what am I going to do?" You can see that she wanted to hear a whole practice, as happens in early childhood education, when I went through the details, I gave her support, until she took the path and was able to walk alone and she is doing an excellent job. When the teacher is arriving, he doesn't know about the routine and you go through the unforeseen, "this can happen, but you will act like this, if this situation happens, it's like this" [. .]. So this exchange of experiences is necessary, there has to be more, I think the colleague has to be more open to passing on, because you help, pass on what you know, it's a benefit, it's so good to help someone to walk. Sometimes you will help your colleague to avoid a mistake you made and he doesn't need to make it, because you learned, you already know the way and you will pass the correct one to him.

It appears from this report that there is a great expectation about what to do and how to do it, an anguish present in this initial phase of teaching. But there is also a vision of knowledge transfer back

in the learning approach that we criticized at the beginning of the article. Professor Mônica recalled this initial moment and spoke a little more about the process:

For me it was all very new, because I had never worked on anything. Teacher I thought it was like playing with dolls and coming across the student is another reality.

Mônica completed her narrative by presenting how the experienced teachers with whom she lived in the workspace contributed to her being able to organize her practice: “they were guiding me, helping me, delivering materials, even helping me.”

When bringing what was experienced at the beginning of her career, the teacher did not fail to expose the role of experienced teachers in her professional development, referring to practical situations in which engagement and collaboration helped her professional education. In addition, “professional practice is, therefore, a very important element of the profession that is being constituted as teachers come into action” [4].

Exposing in more detail other actions provided by the practical context of work and that cooperated to overcome the initial challenges of teaching, Professor Rafaela narrated that:

I had a colleague in the next room who helped me a lot, we were always exchanging ideas, always talking. She gave me tips on games and dynamics to calm them down and calm me down too, so we could get along. Also with written material, paper actually, she gave me a lot, showed me a lot of how to organize written activities. [...] So it became easier, with companionship, the task became easier.

The role of the experienced teacher in this episode revealed the professional’s care for her co-worker, which demonstrates her concern for her own profession. This is reflected in the future of teaching, as support at this stage is decisive for the permanence and development of good professionals.

Experienced teachers can occupy a valuable position, as they carry knowledge that, if shared, makes entering the teaching career a less painful and richer learning process. Although we know that this is not enough for true mentoring, we realize that it is already present in this unofficial partnership that the teachers have at this school.

In line with the authors’ position, teacher Jessica reinforced the presence of experienced educators in her insertion process by reflecting on her initial experiences:

[...] In everything they helped me, in everything [...]

“This makes us give a lot of value, without the other we cannot walk alone. Where I talk to you, what makes the difference is this support, what we need, from this team.”

The value of the work developed along this path is perceptible. The support of experienced teachers collaborates to break the initial barriers of the profession and also favors and encourages collective actions, abandoning individualistic practices and moving toward the development of the entire school community. In line with this perspective, Almeida, Pimenta, and Fusari [23] understand “[...] that it is necessary to consolidate school life on democratic bases, with a dynamic of participatory, collective pedagogical management and committed to learning and the inclusion of everyone in the world of knowledge.”

Regarding the contribution between peers and partnership in school contexts, the speech of the experienced teacher Eva encouraged each professional to continue to overcome the daily challenges of the profession: “It still helps, because I don’t have much experience in early childhood education, I have it in primary school [...], but I seek a lot of help.”

In this way, a school that walks collectively, in which its professionals care and contribute to the development of both, opens space for affections. In this support, the experienced teacher Fernanda took a stand, recalling the support received:

In my first year, I tell you that Antônia was my “mother,” that she was my support. As she was my classmate, she said “Fernanda let’s do this, Fernanda let’s work like this.” So it was she who gave me the guides. [...] it helped me a lot, she had a very solid background, I think she was doing pedagogy at the time and had an impressive experience, it helped me a lot.

This aspect was also pointed out in other narratives, such as that of Professor Mônica: “Until then I had no practice with children, who helped me a lot was Sabrina, she was a mother to me.”

The relevance of the relationship built between experienced and beginners is recognized as a crucial factor to resist the initial adversities of the profession, as evidenced in the narrative of the teacher Jessica: “If it weren’t for both, those two I have them to this day, they became mothers for me, at the time I didn’t even consider them as friends, they were mothers to me. What they did to help me was the mainstay, if it weren’t for both I wouldn’t be able to stay [...].”

Finally, these experiences illustrate that relationships between professors are not reduced to competitiveness and that work and the situations experienced affect all existing links in the school, and this is what drives the teacher to continue, to resist. “Letting oneself be affected, intentionally provoking affection in others, can build a more sensitive path [...].” [24]. Therefore, based on these relationships established between these professionals, the professional induction phase can become moments of exchange, support, knowledge, learning, and affection.

6. Conclusions

Discussions and reflections on the teaching profession and, in particular, on the initial phase of teaching are important ways to create better conditions for these professionals, solid education, and quality teaching. It is known that the beginning of a career is a time of challenges. It is by understanding the particularities of this insertion process that it will be possible to think about effective work with these professionals.

For this, the spaces of initial formation and the school contexts are fundamental for the development of each teacher. From this perspective, we sought to highlight the importance of induction programs, especially the actions that determine mentoring. Despite few projects actually instituted in Brazil, voluntary initiatives by more experienced teachers were identified in some contexts [3].

Based on the experience of a novice teacher with her work group – teachers working in early childhood education – it was observed how the partnership and support of experienced teachers helped novice teachers to overcome the situations present at the beginning of the profession. Thus, the research counted on the participation of both experienced and beginning teachers from a public school located in the interior of the state of Rio de Janeiro. The research revealed that, although the institutions where they experienced the beginning of the profession did not present actions that collaborated for beginning teachers, these teachers were supported by experienced teachers. These occupied, even if informally, the role of mentors, leading and providing support at that time.

Through the narratives, the teachers revisited their memories, giving new meaning to the process that made them teachers. When reconstructing their experiences, they showed that, in addition to the

professional aspect, they let themselves be touched by the affections, by the feelings they built with their peers, which made the initial journey a moment of sharing, rich in learning.

It is also important to highlight the importance of the affective dimension for teaching. In this sense, Almeida [25] argues that the criticism around vocation and love needs to be rethought to rediscover the detail, the dissonant note, and the plurality of social structures and actors that transit in it. In view of this, affection and sharing proved to be requirements for the construction of and continuity in teaching.

Overall, the research highlighted the importance of professional relationships – between experienced and younger teachers – that take on an affective dimension, and collaborative questioning as a necessary condition for stronger participation by beginning teachers. This includes problematizing one's own actions and professional identity as a necessary condition for their professional development. Therefore, these data allow us to consider changes in schools; in professional practice; in initial teacher education, which requires a stronger relationship with schools; and in other contexts, especially the need for such induction processes not to occur informally, but through formal programs and policies.

Finally, it is pointed out that, although initiatives such as these are present in some school contexts, contributing to the permanence in the profession and the development of many teachers, it is, in fact, necessary to make them effective throughout the country. There is, therefore, a need to expand in education spaces and school contexts, so that they can take care of the education of new teachers and provide quality education. For this, it is necessary to reflect on what is theoretically being produced, as well as the practical aspect, building this perspective inseparably.

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Ethical Statement

This study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of Brazil Platform Approval No.: 3.977.977 CAAE: 29242220.5.0000.8160. All participants of the study provided their written consent before participating in the study.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support this work are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

Author Contribution Statement

Débora Nascimento de Lima: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. **Amanda Oliveira Rabelo:** Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

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