

Epistemology of practice in continuous teacher training of Agulhas Negras Military Academy


Epistemología de la práctica en la formación continuada de profesores de la Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras

Abstract: The aim of this article is to discuss the epistemology of practice in continuous teacher training in a military institution of higher education. An exploratory applied research with a qualitative approach was intended, as it is a bibliographic and documentary research. Its objective lies in the possibility of presenting concepts and actions taken by the institution that focuses on the professional development of teachers within the Brazilian Army (EB). We attempted to emphasize the in-service training, its specificities, concepts and conditions that involve education in a military environment, more precisely, at the Agulhas Negras Military Academy (AMAN), locus of the research. The continuous training of higher education teachers, within this context, is analyzed from the perspective of his/her experience as a training process. This article is the result of research that was carried out by graduates of the Master's in Education Program accredited by the University of Taubaté (UNITAU).

Keywords: Continuous Training. Brazilian Army. Agulhas Negras Military Academy.

Resumen: Este artículo busca discutir cuestiones sobre la epistemología de la práctica en la formación continua de profesores en una institución militar de educación superior. Se trata de una investigación exploratoria con enfoque cualitativo y de carácter bibliográfico y documental. Su objetivo es presentar los conceptos y las acciones adoptados por la institución, voltados al desarrollo del profesional docente en el Ejército Brasileño (EB). Se buscó dar énfasis a la formación en servicio, sus especificidades, conceptos y condicionantes que involucran la formación en un ambiente militar, más precisamente en la Academia Militar de Agulhas Negras (AMAN), el *locus* de la investigación. La formación continua de los profesores universitarios, en este contexto, se analiza desde el punto de vista de su experiencia como proceso formativo. El artículo es resultado de investigaciones desarrolladas por egresados de la Maestría Profesional en Educación de la Universidad de Taubaté (UNITAU).

Palabras-clave: Formación Continua. Ejército Brasileño. Academia Militar de Agulhas Negras.

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1 Introduction

It is a well-known fact that society and its representative entities, including the educational system, have been going through a series of changes. In the Armed Forces, particularly in the Brazilian Army (EB), this framework goes beyond the mere acquisition of new equipment and weapons, or the reformulation of its rules, and is developed with an emphasis on training its personnel for the exercise of their professional activities. The entire training process aims to reach more qualified staff in an increasingly plural, demanding and selective society.

Professional development is a long and continuous process that lasts throughout a person's (professional) adult life. The main objective of this training is the socialization of the individual as a citizen, which makes the educational process dynamic, since the social system is constantly changing and demanding changes in the social, political, economic and ideological models that influence the student. In the Army, in particular, the training process of its staff is found in the affective, psychomotor and cognitive domains and is consolidated through the acquisition of certain professional skills linked to their development.

By analyzing the elements that constitute continuous teacher education, as well as those that help us to understand this professional as a subject in constant development, it is possible to understand their training in a teaching institution with characteristics worthy of investigation, as it operates in a context which differs from the usual academic realm. The subject brings with him/her experiences that will add to both media, that is, the civil and the military. For the construction of knowledge in this context it is important that the teacher constantly seeks to achieve the objectives defined in the teaching policies in force in the Forces¹.

Military education aims to provide the training of professional staff, as well as to ensure their improvement and specialization throughout their career (WORTMEYER, 2017). The EB command realized that the education of the individual is a unique problem and its aim is to value, through education, the citizen (BRASIL, 2010). It should be clarified that the expression "military education" here applies to educational processes that take place in military organizations belonging to the Armed Forces (Navy, Army and Air Force), as well as in the Auxiliary Forces (Military Police and Military Fire Department).

The speed with which changes are processed in the age of knowledge cannot be neglected, as it contributes to the "transformation" and modernization of the institution continuously. This process, in addition to being time-consuming, broad and profound, should not neglect the institution's traditional principles and values.

Based on the understanding that globalization redefines markets, modifies geographic space and people's way of thinking, the members of the EB professional staff are encouraged to keep up-to-date and prepared to operate the various weapons, communications and information technology systems (IT) among others.

1 The term 'Forces' here means Brazilian Army as part of the broader term "Armed Forces".

In relation to what was said in the previous paragraph, it is necessary to emphasize Mercado (2002) argument that teachers need a new attitude since it opens up a new range of possibilities in the teaching and learning process, giving the opportunity for the teachers to develop the knowledge of their students. In this context, the profile of the “weapons professional” must be consonant with the progressive changes that occur in the area of knowledge and with the ideas disseminated in different sectors of society (BRASIL, 1996).

In terms of education and culture, the Armed Forces investments were directed towards academic and professional training. The direction of the process is to ensure that education is capable of producing permanent effects on its human resources; and that they become able to carry out their professional activities carrying out their tasks effectively (BRASIL, 2010).

Given the above arguments, this article intends to carry out an analysis of aspects related to continuous education in a military higher education institution², more precisely at the Agulhas Negras Military Academy (AMAN), as a way of providing inputs to the construction of the epistemology of the teaching praxis in the academic community. Notably, this article is limited to the study of teaching activity in a classroom of a military higher education institution where pedagogical interactions take place.

2 Methodology

Based on a qualitative approach, we sought to carry out a bibliographic review and a documental analysis on laws, regiments and plans for exclusive use of the Army. This study is understood as an exploratory research.

The research relies on data collected by the authors under the Professional Master’s in Education of the University of Taubaté (UNITAU) and authorized by its Ethics and Research Committee (CEP), under the Opinion nº. 7,619,064 and Research Authorization Term, issued by the Agulhas Negras Military Academy (AMAN).

3 Considerations on Continuous Teacher Education

Continuous education can be understood as one of the processes of valuing the teacher that results in both the molding of their identity and the gradual understanding of the processes concerning the educational activity. In higher education, this practice has been the theme and object of analysis and discussion, due to its transformation.

The terms used to define teacher training over the years have been many. The expression “recycling” was used, in line with the thought of transforming materials, training, repetition of tasks; “improvement”, referring to the sense of completing, bringing to perfection; and, cur-

² Decree No. 613, of November 13, 2000, recognizes and accredits the Agulhas Negras Military Academy as a Higher Education Institution.

rently, the expressions “capacitation”, “development” are used to allude to becoming capable and/or qualified for something in the performance of their professional functions during the course of their career.

As stated, it is necessary to consider that the constitution of teaching knowledge is based on praxis and also on a knowledge that is objectified as it is built, in other words, a process of reconstruction and reconstitution of experience (obtained until that moment) and continuous improvement of individual and collective development of teachers. The teacher has acquired experiences and, as he questions himself in the profession and in his work environment, he reorients his actions and practices (SCHÖN, 1995).

Such practical and reflective action requires from this professional the ability to interpret, understand and question. It is evident that reflection implies “the conscious immersion of man in the world and his experience, a world full of connotations, values, symbolic exchanges, affective correspondences, social interests and political scenarios” (PÉREZ GÓMEZ, 1992, p. 103). Teacher training demands from its conductors (managers, teachers and instructors) a posture focused on critical thinking and, at the same time, reflective on their praxis.

In military educational institutions where training takes place and where one learns; incorporating what was learned into its portfolio of practices and actions. For the teacher, the environment becomes the place of permanent learning for all actors in a “continuum” of productive interaction.

As in any other University, its teachers (professors and instructors) go through a process of construction of their teaching identity. Their practices, narratives and the adopted language directly reverberate in the attitudes and behaviors of their students.

The excerpt of the Army Bulletin (BE) No. 49, of December 5, 2014, defines the duties of these professors and instructors, including the following:

I –to actively participate in the cadet's intellectual and moral training; II –to plan, prepare, guide and control the class or instruction session corresponding to the discipline under his/her responsibility; III –to evaluate the performance of the cadets; [...] VI –to contribute to the development of cognitive, attitudinal and evaluative preparation necessary for the officer[...] (BRASIL, 2014, p. 11).

While thinking and reflecting on his teaching action, the teacher creates knowledge. Thus, the training needs to find similarity in “desires, problems, needs and deficiencies perceived in the development of teaching” (MARCELO GARCÍA, 1992, p. 66). Here, the theorist clarifies that the teacher thinks about teaching which influences his way of teaching, adopting new strategies and concepts if assisted by specialists.

This same author understands that “any strategy that intends to provide reflection includes developing teachers competences [...] that allow them to know, analyze, question their own teaching practice” (MARCELO GARCÍA, 1992, p. 64), highlighting that there is an

urgent need for the institution and the educational public policy makers to “look” at the teachers as agents contributing to the academic success of students.

In this regard, this type of continuing education provides teachers with the ability to reflect on their actions and the possibility to expand senses and meanings of their practice, since they are able to look at their teaching practice as a spectator.

Here, it is up to us to reinforce that the School (full sense) is the most appropriate place to carry out this type of reflection, as it is the context of professional teaching activity. The proposal to place teacher training in the school environment is supported by Silva, Bussolotti and Leão (2018, p. 19) argument, that school is the “privileged ‘locus’ for the management of curricular dialectics and the generator of new educational cultures”.

Furthermore, teacher training must be conducted by a professional/team from the school itself, understanding that the commitment of teachers, in discussing the practical problems they face, is the best way to foster professional development, i.e., a movement towards teacher self-understanding of their roles and tasks (ELLIOT, 1990, p. 244-245).

We understand that the described situation leads teacher training towards professional preparation, with a strong presence of the school (University), which dedicates specific space/time for teacher learning. Therefore, Marcelo García and Vaillant (2001) argue that “learning in the organization presupposes social processing of information, socialization of culture and the development of new goals, structures, strategies and environments” (p. 29).

Regarding the institutional role in this process, the pedagogical models applied should seek, whenever possible, the best performance of the teachers’ attributions. No less importantly, the intrinsic issues of individuals, that is, professional identity, must be considered. Marcelo (2009) argues that it is up to the institution:

[...] to understand the professional development of teachers shaping it só as to encourage the search for professional identity [...]. It is a construction of the professional self, which evolves throughout their careers. The school can influence [...] knowledge about the subjects they teach and how they are taught, past experiences, as well as their own professional vulnerability (p. 7).

The issues surrounding professional development as something continuous are reinforced here, highlighting the need to contextualize knowledge from multiple known sources, useful for the constructive process of this professional identity, promoting reflection and re-elaboration of their practices.

Silva, Bussolotti and Leão (2018, p. 16) argue that knowledge can quickly and abruptly fall into disuse, with the teacher no longer reproducing content, but able to create knowledge, to produce knowledge.

Furthermore, it is worth emphasizing the idea that the teacher is an essential protagonist in social directions, since the classroom is the place where students, under the guidance of the teacher, have one more opportunity to debate and discuss issues of their professional interest in addition to social, family and ethical issues.

On these issues, it is important to the argument by Hargreaves (2003), a specialist in knowledge society issues, who states that today's teachers need to teach in a way they never learned. This reinforces the "synapses" that present-day professors have the capacity to build a differentiated type of professionalism, often discarding what they learned in their initial training.

Analyzing the aspects of a relational order, we agree with the assertions of Day (2001) who argues that teachers not only revive and renew their commitment when reflecting on the ethical and moral purposes of teaching, but also expand this commitment when considering that their experiences and sharing have beneficial consequences. The theorist emphasizes that it is an individual and institutional need that presupposes a commitment to continuous learning.

The issue at hand is the need to invest (in the institution and among professors) in creating a structure that provides opportunities for the teacher to describe and analyze the challenges related to their training, thus allowing them to create a "community of learners", that is, allowing them to learn and develop in different communities and contexts.

Assuming that education must be a continuous, systematic and organized process, we understand that it permeates the entire professional career. This development provides the institution and students with quality education, in its various dimensions. It should be noted that this training should be work-oriented, in view of the significant changes in education (GATTI; BARRETO; ANDRÉ, 2011, p. 185).

In the next topic, some aspects of teacher education will be presented, understood as necessary for a greater elucidation of the facts presented so far.

4 Teacher Training from an Epistemological Perspective

Regarding teacher knowledge (and praxis), Roldão (2007, p. 99) deals with the nature of this knowledge and states that there are two essential sources of interpretation on the subject: the first has an interpretive focus on the analysis of its components, while the second is focused on "valuing professional practice reflected as its primary source". The author emphasizes that, although there is a certain divergence in the interpretation of each source, they end up converging in the interpretation and analysis of the praxis in line with the knowledge that sustains them, considering that one focuses on "necessary prior knowledge" and the other on knowledge that is generated from the practice itself. The author explains the importance of "clarifying" the nature of professional knowledge, requiring its epistemological unveiling.

Based on this understanding of the importance of practice and its "epistemological unveiling", borrowing the term from Roldão (2007), it can be argued that the continuing education of teachers is linked to the meanings and resignifications of professional dyna-

mics, that the teacher needs to reflect and explain to himself, how he develops and underpins his practices.

The epistemological concept of teacher training is polysemic, permitting different interpretations, but all harmonized in the dialectical sense of the act of training. It can be said that the epistemological issues in this context do not end with the way the professional teacher thinks and learns, as they are validated both by the analysis of current training practices and by the theory and practice dichotomy (axiom of teaching activity).

Based on the thought of Marin (1995), the design of continuing education presents education in an evolutionary process, that is, one that runs throughout the entire personal and professional activity. This construction, if we can call it that, takes place in the work environment as a “social practice of education that mobilizes all possibilities and all knowledge” (MARIN, 1995, p. 18).

In Santos (2010), an analysis of the theoretical perspectives in continuing teacher education is presented. In our country, two active epistemologies are highlighted: the technical rationality and the epistemology of practice. Among the authors who deal with the subject at hand, we highlight Curado Silva and Limonta (2014), who analyze the concepts that involve the reflective teacher and the praxis. The authors explain that the appreciation of practical knowledge defines a pragmatic character in the educational issue and is consolidated through educational policies (hegemonic bias).

Furthermore, it is essential to understand that the knowledge that is built from the interaction with school agents (not excluding students) and the school context should not be limited to their own activity. The practice through the theoretical explanation of reality, the lived experience, its interpretation and construction of meaning and sense are really important.

It should be noted that the progression of the teacher as a professional is forged by practice, by reflection on the reality that surrounds him, fostering the dimension of “transformation” of students as a function of the school and its agents. It is a “Metamorphosis”³.

It is understood that the process of formation of an individual is consolidated through the assimilation and exchange of knowledge in a continuous process of “seeking to know”. Taking the epistemology of praxis as a presupposition, “knowing” is found in the social practice of these teachers based on the understanding of reality. Thus, it is necessary considering the reality of teaching work focused on what is intended to be achieved in the educational field.

Professional training, in this manner, can bring valuable benefits to the School and to the teacher (individual and professional subject). In this position, the key focus of this training process should be dialogue, the exchange of ideas and information, feedback provided by the most experienced, among other activities. Continuing education should focus on training the historical subject based on the cohesive relationships between theory and practice, offering inputs so that teachers are able to guide and transform the conditions imposed on them.

This enables the construction of a solid foundation regarding the episteme of teaching praxis, which enables the professional to understand and be able to understand the technical, aesthetic, political and didactic dimensions in delivering an education aimed at emancipation and

3 The terminology was coined based on the work of Franz Kafka “Metamorphosis”, written in 1912. According to the author, the work makes us understand that we are in a constant process of transformation and that we are influenced by the environment, systems and people.

autonomy of the human being. The key idea here is to go beyond the technicist model and utilize practice, that is, to enable “knowing how to do” in the technical, ethical and political dimensions of teaching work, in line with the formative principle of their work.

According to Silva (2018, p. 37-42), it is possible identify some necessary prerequisites for this training, such as: it must be an exercise in historicity in the production of knowledge, that is, training becomes a process of reflection and analysis of issues, based on the individual and interaction with their institution; training should involve teaching work (teacher's work and life); a formative proposal in which knowledge takes place in action and in the subject-object relationship, allowing the teacher (agent of action) to reflect properly on daily school life, their pedagogical practice and the reality in which it takes place; it must think about the social function of education and the school, starting from the problematization of its role and the articulation of the segments that make up the school in the achievement of its projects as a social agent.

The role of education is paramount. The teachers are required to obtain adequate preparation and broad knowledge. Likewise, these professionals are expected to understand, among other things, their training contexts; and, last but not least, that, in the course of experiences and practices, they develop teaching strategies that can enable solid learning by students.

In the next section, some considerations about continuing education at AMAN will be made, in line with what has been presented so far.

5 Continuing Teacher Training at AMAN

The Army Education Policy was established by Ordinance No. 715, of December 6, 2002. It is the responsibility of the Army Chief of Staff (EME) and the Department of Education and Culture of the Army (DCEX) to conduct and disseminate education based on regulations following three main lines.

The first of these lines defines teaching activity as a priority, as the training of its staff depends on it; the second defines that teaching should strive to use pedagogical techniques, as tools for transmitting information, which contribute to self-improvement; and finally, the third places the student at the center of learning process (LUCHETTI, 2006, p. 119).

It is imperative that the activities of military schools - which does not exclude AMAN, the institution that is the focus of this research - are guided by the basic principles of the military profession, which consist of historical and cultural values (norms, discipline and hierarchy), attitudes and inherent perspectives to the performance of the function.

The professors of that Higher Education Institution (HEI) are adequately qualified for their functions and are selected through a public competition (examination) and are evaluated annually, in view of the need to update their teaching practices. Ratifying what we have just described, Sarkis and Machado (2019, p. 27) write:

[...] in the Army's military schools, the appreciation of the teacher and the encouragement of professional improvement as well as the modernization of educational management are recognized, without forgetting the traditions and the practice of perpetual values [...], pillars that support all Military Organizations.

The professional training of the individual is a unique problem, whether civil or military, because what matters is that the citizen is valued without distinction throughout the educational process. In this sense the Armed Forces are one of the important segments of the same great social whole, because the soldier is not distinguished from the citizen, except for the limitations imposed by the career he chose.

Therefore, the continuing education of the teacher is focused on the realization of human existence based on the reality of the subject. This practice is active and produced in a reflexive, relational and transformational manner in the subject and in the environment that surrounds him. Consequently, the pedagogical models applied at the AMAN institution should, whenever possible, be reassessed, aiming at improving the performance of its professors.

As a result, teaching improvement is understood, by all involved, as a constant and ever-evolving process. In the institution, the identification of the necessary competences for professional performance represents the interface between education and work, dimensions with distinct specificities, but which complement each other.

In order to provide quality education, educational policy aims to offer teachers and instructors adequate and accessible training. At the institution, the Pedagogical Coordination Section (SCP)⁴ is responsible for coordinating and supervising all in-service training initiatives. The Internal Regulations of AMAN define that the institution must “encourage and guide professors in carrying out training courses, postgraduate courses, specialization and extension” (BRASIL, 2015, p. 23). In other words, the teacher is in constant training aimed at improving their knowledge.

Important point to consider, given the specificities of the training product (the Cadet⁵), is that continuing education takes place through training opportunities, mentioned in the previous paragraph, and through the exchange of experiences in the institution between the more “experienced” and recent graduates. Thus, the meetings, symposia and congresses in which they participate aim to demystify concepts, practices and the use of new methodologies to be introduced in the classroom, whether technological or not.

This search for improvement can be supported by Imbernón (2005), who argues that “innovation requires new and old pedagogical concepts and a new professional culture forged in the values of collaboration and social progress” (IMBERNÓN, 2005, p. 19). The author also draws attention to the fact that these methodological innovations, if we can call them so, must be directly related to “Educational Research in Practice”, i.e., the teacher acti-

4 The Section is part of the Teaching Division at AMAN and includes Planning Subsection, Learning Assessment Subsection, Research Subsection and Pedagogical Monitoring Subsection.

5 Term historically used to identify a student in a Military Academy.

vely participates in this process of change, making adaptations and creations according to their educational context.

On the issue of pedagogical innovation (practical or theoretical), however, Moran (1995) argues that technological innovations (purely) cannot replace a good teacher, therefore, there is a real need for the professional to find a new way to function, as he/she is expected to be an agent that “Transforms information into knowledge and knowledge into knowledge, into life, into wisdom - knowledge with ethics” (MORAN, 1995, p. 25).

That said, it is necessary to reflect on the relevance of this professional. Gatti (2016, p. 39), argues:

To ensure the quality of this professional one requires training courses that offer teachers an understanding of the cognitive, socio-affective, cultural development and understanding of what can motivate children and adolescents in their learning [...] to establish relationships of these contents with the world that surrounds us all.

According to Santos (2018) the essential competencies for the exercise of teaching go beyond the teaching knowledge and even reach the competence of the teacher, which is improved by their professional development. The theorist also states that teacher development follows a training path that can be followed individually or collectively, with the institution exercising a relevant contributing role in carrying out this training.

Based on what Zabala (1998, p. 9) says, it seems clear that this formative process “is so rich, so complex and so dynamic, that it provokes discussion and debate between positions that are sometimes coincident, sometimes conflicting”, encouraging us to understand that it is a practice that demands articulation, reflection and adequate practice, contextualized in the present day.

In short, the policy of teacher training at the Academia Militar das Agulhas Negras makes it clear that the exercise of the profession demands training based on values and traditions, which constitute the pillars of that institution. It is not limited to the formal transmission of scientific content characteristic of each discipline and involves aspects related to didactics and the multiple variables that characterize teaching (BRASIL, 2010).

It is correct to conclude that AMAN professors and instructors follow well-established standards and knowledge of all members. However, the respect for the norms and the ethical and moral values of the Army institution do not limit the search for innovation of the teaching professional, nor their creativity. This is how the “Mission” of the AMAN military person is described: “Create with ethics” (BRASIL, 2019, p. 6).

6 Final Considerations

This study aimed to analyze specific questions regarding teacher education and their development in a military education institution, presenting a part of the philosophical founda-

tions of the studies carried out for the construction of a Master's dissertation presented to the Professional Master's Program in Education at the University of Taubaté.

The proposal is to place training in the contexts of teaching practice and personal issues. Also, in providing teachers with spaces to “re-think” and “re-build” their activities as education professionals.

Throughout the pages of this article, the importance of analyzing the in-service training process and its specificities, scope and objectives was noted, under an epistemological view at the practice in a military education institution (AMAN).

In the course of this research, we considered it appropriate to present concepts and assumptions that involve continuing education and its characteristics, as well as to reflect on the importance of structuring in the institution, training based on the joint construction of this process.

In sequence, we present how, in the light of the authors who deal with the subject in question, the continuing education in a Military Academy of the Brazilian Army and its policies for teacher education are developed.

Finally, we identified that continuing education is consolidated in the work environment, i.e. in the School itself, and that it represents the appropriate environment for the construction of this process. It is at the School where the interpretation and transformation of reality and the exchange of experiences take place, and where the teaching professional will consolidate their professional identity.

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