

# The pedagogical coordinator and the continued training of early grade teachers\*

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## Abstract

This article discusses the work of pedagogical coordinators at public schools in the city of São Paulo facing two models of continued teaching training: the Special Action Project (Projeto Especial de Ação (PEA)), designed by the local school system itself, and the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (Pacto Nacional pela Alfabetização na Idade Certa (PNAIC)), a federal program adopted as a public local policy from 2013 through 2016 and directly implemented for teachers by external agents. Both models took place concomitantly in the city's public schools along the mentioned period, which led to a questioning about how pedagogical coordinators dealt with teachers working with literacy cycle (1st to 3rd grade). The research is qualitative and the methodology consists of a bibliographical review on teacher's basic training and educational counseling, of documental studies, and semi-structured interviews with initial grades teachers in Elementary School, pedagogical coordinators and formative professionals from two Regional Instruction Departments in the city's school system. The results reveal that educational counseling represents an important link between the public policies for continued teacher training and their school practices, either on local or federal level, so that pedagogical coordinators must be involved in their implementation. It is considered that the two models are potentially transforming, provided that they engage the practices that are conducted in the classrooms, offering an opportunity to be absorbed together with the teachers' knowledge, and provided that they get, for such, constant and systematic support from the managing bodies when resolving impasses, overcoming shortages, and sustaining the advancements achieved.

## Keywords

Pedagogical Coordination – Literacy – Teacher training.

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## Introduction

In 2020, the *Resolution of National Education Council (CNE/CP) No. 1* is published, setting forth the National Curricular Guidelines for the Continued Training of Basic Education Teachers and establishes the National Common Base for the Continued Training of Basic Education Teachers (Brasil, 2020)<sup>3</sup>. This demonstrates how relevant this topic is within the educational debate. In the case of continued training for initial-grades teachers, one of the highlights is the literacy of children, since learning to read and to write is an important path to construct a number of other areas of knowledge as well as to fully exercise citizenship.

Educational researches have demonstrated that three first years of elementary school are very significant in the literacy of children. This is a challenge that mobilize the different spheres of government, both on the federal level and on the states and local school systems. Among the approaches utilized in very diverse proposals, the continued training of teachers emerges as a common horizon.

In the city of São Paulo and also in the same state, this is a constant concern. Programs addressing continued teacher training had already become prevailing in the policies for the early grades of elementary school since the 2000's.

In 2012, the federal government established the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), in a new attempt to focus the debate around this issue, greatly unresolved in the country. Its objective: make sure children up to the age of 8 get literate, in accord with goal 5 of the National Education Plan (Brasil, 2014). There was a great deal of momentum by states and local authorities in joining the pact.

Yet, in 2015, the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) showed alarming results concerning literacy (Brasil, 2015a). Through tests with pencil and paper applied to 3rd-graders from Brazilian schools in 2013, the outcome revealed that 24% of students had low proficiency in reading. In 2014, this index dropped to 22%, however, it was still considered impressive. Only 10% of the children assessed in 2013 and 11% in 2014 showed appropriate proficiency, meaning that a large contingent of students fell midway regarding the mastery of basic reading tools. In relation to writing, assessed only in 2014, the results showed that 56% of students were reasonably familiar with writing tools, while only 10% were able to adequately write a text. Yet, 15% of the children assessed could write words only and about 12% were not able to write.

In the city of São Paulo, whose population was estimated to be 12.3 million inhabitants in 2020 and with a really unbalanced income distribution, the challenges are amplified. Such challenges include ensuring citizens the right to quality education, which requires literacy for all. In this regard, the experience of public schools in the city of São Paulo may shed some light to the issue, considering that the city's school system has a rich history of actions for the early grades, as well as a structure that enables the issue to

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**3-** In Brazil, Basic Education includes: Early Childhood Education (from zero to 5 years old), Elementary Education (from 6 to 14 years old) and Secondary Education (from 15 to 17 or 18 years old).



be dealt with, among other ways, continued teacher training, something that for decades has been part of the teachers' everyday routine. In addition, it is a school system that has counted since 1985 with a pedagogical coordinator, whose functions include mainly to organize and conduct the continued training of teachers within the schools. Such continued training must take place within the teachers' working hours.

With this in mind, this article presents a summary of a master's study (Perini, 2018) dealing with the work of pedagogical coordinators in the literacy cycle in city of São Paulo's public school system, focusing on their role as pedagogical trainers, by contrasting their actions in two training models adopted between 2013 and 2016. The first model, Special Action Project (PEA), devised by the São Paulo city's school system, is aimed to be conducted in the school premises drawing from the internal formative demands, where the pedagogical coordinator is the major integrating agent. The second model, the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC), designed by the federal government for all school systems in the country, is put in place by external agents who work directly with the teachers. Even though they are two programs of different sizes, the analysis looked into what they have in common: the continued training of teachers and the fact that they had been provided at the same time at the schools of São Paulo in the mentioned period.

## Methodology

The research has a qualitative approach and was based on theoretical and empirical references coming from: bibliographical review of continued teacher education, of teacher training policies in Basic Education, and of pedagogical coordination; documental study looking into official documents and the legislation affecting the public school system of the city of São Paulo; as well as semi-structured interviews with education professionals.

Among the main authors included in the bibliography, we highlight as a theoretical reference the work by Imbernón (2010), who joins the ranks of scholars for whom the continued teacher training must be able to promote the autonomy in identifying and searching for solutions to the problems teachers experience on a daily basis. Problematic situations, for Imbernón, contrast with training models which address generic topics, with a technicist approach, which scarcely interact with the real needs of teachers. Moreover, the author reminds the collective aspect of teaching, especially in the formative actions taking place in the change and for the change, reinforcing the urgency of developing reflexive skills in teamwork. Thus, the pedagogical trainer takes the role of a hands-on collaborator in moments of reflection, in contrast to a training model in which someone merely conveys knowledge to others.

Bolívar (2016) reasserts the importance of cooperative work and argues that the proposal should take the school as an organization intended for learning, that is, the school is to be seen as a basic unit and must not be guided by individual fragments. This perspective allows for the existence of communities of practice in the contexts of work, which looking at the teaching actions try and find the elements necessary for studies and propositions of improvement, drawing from a self-review of each teacher and followed by



an action of the educational establishment as a whole and the system it is a part of. This results in shared responsibility towards the ultimate goal of a school, that is, to ensure all students will learn.

Similarly, Nóvoa (2019) highly values the dialogue between teaching and scientific knowledge and argues that teachers should get involved in constructing their own training; he believes that it is “[...] in the complexity of a training that expands itself drawing from the professional cultures and experiences that we might find a way out for the dilemmas faced by the teachers” (p. 11).

We have also sought Paulo Freire’s (2010) perspective, based on the idea of the individuals being incomplete, which subordinates them to the need of constant learning, since it is only among men and women that “[...] they became aware of their incompleteness” (p. 50). Henceforth, the need to be on a constant process of formation.

Regarding literacy, the theoretical framework comes from those underpinning PNAIC as they equally are found in the curricular materials of the São Paulo city’s school system. In light of constructivist and interactionist theories on learning, teaching to read and write is understood as a social practice encompassing the acquisition of the Alphabetic Writing System (Ferreiro; Teberosky, 1984) and the acknowledgement and use of reading and writing practices which Magda Soares (1998) called literacy. This perspective places the student in the center of the process, since through thinking he will build writing hypothesis which allow him to move forward until the alphabetic basis is reached. Concomitantly, the learner will participate in reading and writing contexts, what requires an effort of continued teacher training, which may perhaps persist in out-of-context literacy practices.

Owing to their extensive work on pedagogical coordination in Brazil, special attention was paid to the study by de Placco, Souza, and Almeida (2011) in order to better position the object of this research and provide empirical and reflexive parameters to conduct the analysis of the São Paulo school system. The texts analyzed, including the one by Domingues (2014), clearly reveal that continued teacher training is the major assignment of the professional who, in the city of São Paulo, can take place in several circumstances: monitoring teachers and students, the evaluations and assessments, the interactions, and the moments of study.

The normative references involving teacher training for the first school grades in regard of the children’s learning how to read and write is legally supported by the policies of Basic Education on the federal level and they have a long trajectory in the state and local systems, which are directly in charge of providing such learning. What is set forth by the Act of the National Educational Guidelines and Bases of 1996, by the National Education Plan and by the national literacy programs are intertwined with the normative provisions and the policies of each city and state, or are intersected with them.

With the purpose of raising clues related to how the formative actions have been developing in the schools, the next step in the research was to conduct interviews with seventeen (17) education professionals from two Regional Education Departments (DREs). Among them were five pedagogical coordinators, nine literacy teachers, and three educational trainers from the same DREs. The objective of the interviews was to apprehend



the meanings assigned to the two formative models and how the pedagogical coordinators participated in both models. The interviews were conducted between December, 2016, and October, 2017, focusing on the work of CPs which strived to create space for the continued teacher training within each school's daily routine.

All the individuals selected for the research were directly involved with the processes that we had been seeking to comprehend; they were all female and legally qualified to take those positions; they had been working for 5 to 20 years in the school system (only one of them had 20 years of experience). Once the objectives of the investigation had been explained and the respective terms of consent had been signed, the interviews were conducted on the school premises, recorded and, subsequently, transcribed and analyzed.

The approach was inspired by the precepts of a reflexive interview, proposed by Szymanski, Almeida, and Prandini (2002). Those precepts intend to make a movement of return to the interviewee, consisting of telling him how the understanding of their answers is being constructed, so that the individual may reformulate, disagree or agree with the narrative presented. Thus, it is possible to establish a horizontal dialogue that seeks to minimize the power relations between the individuals taking part in the interactive process of the interview. This return constitutes, most of all, an ethical commitment. The purpose is that the authorship of the interview is shared by both participants, the interviewer and the interviewee.

Content analyses were conducted of the interviews, based on the methodological proposal made by Franco (2003), inspired in Bardin. Analytical categories emerged from the preliminary reading of the material collected, in order to contribute to answer the questions the research had raised.

It was found that the state-of-the art regarding to PEA and PNAIC is extensive, with several studies containing individual analyses of each program. However, at the time of research, no study was found drawing a parallel between both programs.

## **Teacher training in the context of the city of São Paulo**

The history of the public school system in the city of São Paulo goes back long years. In 1935, the city implemented the first Kindgartens and had modernist writer Mario de Andrade as one of their proposers. The city's schooling was legally established in the 1950's and, since then, a diversity of factors has culminated in what is today the Brazil's largest municipal school system, with over 1 million registrations.

Continued teacher training in this school system was formed over time, but there was a key factor which produced the profile it has today. In 1992, while Luiza Erundina was the mayor, the first Statute of Teaching was created in the city which, among other things, regulates the working time for teachers. A certain split of the working hours was defined as Full-Time Working Hours provided teachers with paid time and space for out-of-class pedagogical activities, such as organizing pedagogical materials, planning, grading assignments, studies and research, including continuous training groups (São Paulo, 1992).



In the following administration (mayor Paulo Maluf), out-of-class time and spaces were specifically dedicated to continued teacher training. Initially, the Strategic Action Plan was created, for the purpose of having the expanded time in the teachers' working hours utilized by the teams to identify problems in their respective schools and find solutions by informing the regional bodies about the strategies selected and the results achieved. Such regional bodies, in turn, found that continued teacher training has been the prevailing strategy among the schools. Then the name was changed from Strategic Action Plan to Special Action Plan under the acronym PEA. Since then, PEA is an integral part of the teachers' working hours, its activities take place within the very school, and they are coordinated by the respective pedagogical coordinator.

### **The Special Action Project (PEA)**

Formalized by specific legislation, PEA represents an important achievement in teacher professionalization and for the improvement of pedagogical processes. Every year, teachers' collectives and the pedagogical coordinator at each public school in São Paulo devise a project based on their formative demands and on the assessment of the projects from previous years, taking into consideration the city's policies and the specificities of each school and the surrounding community. The project is then sent to the school supervisor for analysis and then approved by the Regional Education Director. Afterwards, the project goes back to the school to be implemented along the year, in accordance with the legal regulation, which at the time of research was Ordinance SME No. 901, of 2014 (São Paulo, 2014a).

The purpose of PEA is to implement the city's educational policies; however, it makes room for the schools to include their formative demands, provided it is in accord with the conceptions of school system's management. The first articles of the Ordinances point to priority topics that are to be discussed in the projects. Furthermore, the project must include a series of characteristics: minimum working time of 144 hours along the year for Elementary Education, distributed in eight months along the year; instruments for monitoring and assessing the project so that the group of participants, together with the School Board, decides by the end of the first half of the year if the project is to be maintained, if it is to be re-sized or finished in the second half of the year. At the end of the project, teachers who have complied with the participation and frequency criteria are awarded certificates, which allows them to advance in their teacher career. Added to other courses and to the period of employment, the certificates contribute to the professional development leading to a salary increase.

There are, however, variations in the teachers' hours which limit the participation of the entire group of teachers. The expanded day of work, currently called Special Full Training Time, is a choice of each teacher but requires a complete set of working hours. Teachers who work on a per Module basis, that is, with no assigned classes, who replace other teachers when they are absent or who support full-time teachers, do not take part in such working hours, even if they attend PEA willingly, but with no payment for those hours. There are also teachers who choose the so-called Basic Teaching Time, quite often



for the purpose of working in a second school; they do not have the same number of hours given to out-of-class activities as is the case of teachers with extended hours.

## **The pedagogical coordinators in the São Paulo city's public school system**

An important figure in São Paulo city's continued teacher training is the pedagogical coordinator, whose position is freely assigned by means of public contest for admission, that is, it is aimed at professionals majored in Pedagogy (higher-education) or with a specialization on a graduate level; they must have been in a teaching position in the city's school system. In the absence of a pedagogical coordinator admitted through a public contest, a school may have an assigned CP who is qualified and elected by the School Community Board<sup>4</sup>.

The pedagogical coordinator's legal tasks are defined in Municipal Decree No. 54,453, of October 10, 2013, which also includes other members of the teaching staff. Such decree sets forth more assignments to a CP than the very school principal: pedagogical coordinators count 19 tasks while the school principal gets 17. Indeed, both positions have peculiar traits and their own complexities, however, quantitatively speaking, those are the numbers.

The CP takes part in the management team of a school, together with the school principal, the principal's assistant, and the school supervisor. Even though the CP job officially focuses on training/formative actions, the analysis of the municipal legislation has shown these professionals have a very comprehensive variety of assignments which do not necessarily have to do with the continued teacher training, such as actions intended to monitor the students' attendance, participate in making decisions about funds, supervise internships and other professionals. The challenge faced by a CP lies, therefore, in not allowing that the formative aspect of his job be left on the sidelines in the context of so many tasks he is in charge of.

According to the legal framework that regulates the work of CP within the city's school system there is no difference regarding the schooling stages: they may work in schools intended for Early Child Education up to Youth/Adult Education. At Elementary Schools, there are usually two pedagogical coordinators, depending on the number of classes in the school; they may split the working hours/shifts (morning, afternoon, evening) or on a per schooling cycle basis.

CPs who work with the literacy cycle (1st to 3rd grades) must contribute to promote the literacy of children without neglecting childhood-related issues such as playfulness, children's games, child care. There are important documents intended to draw attention to those topics, such as the *São Paulo's Childhood Integrating Curriculum* (São Paulo, 2015). These texts were written particularly after laws had been passed, which anticipated the age for enrolling at 1st grade in Elementary School to six years (*Federal Act No. 11,114/2005*) and extended Elementary schooling to nine years (*Federal Act No. 11.274/2006*). In

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**4-** The School Community Board consists of the principal and elected representatives of the staff, teachers, students and parents.



guiding documents issued by the Ministry of Education, such decisions consider that “[...] the expansion of Elementary Schooling to nine years means early access to literate culture, which may result in a better performance of students regarding literacy” (Brasil, 2009, p. 26).

In relation to teacher training for literacy, São Paulo city’s school system has been for many years leading a consistent formative path, including large-size programs such as PROFA (Program for the Training of Literacy Teachers) and “Reading and Writing”, which was also adopted by the public schools in the state of São Paulo. Furthermore, there were projects specifically intended for literacy along the first grades, such as “All the Power to the 1st Grade” (TOF) and the “Intensive Project in Cycle” (PIC), under the administrations of Serra/Gilberto Kassab (2005-2012). In this context, when PNAIC came up in 2013, it was not really a surprise for teachers and educational managers.

### **The National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (PNAIC) in the city of São Paulo**

The National Education Plan (2014) defines goals to be achieved throughout the country in the educational sphere along the next 10 years. Out of the 20 goals established, goal 5 clearly indicates the objective of providing literacy to all Brazilian children before they turn eight years old. For such, seven strategies were devised, including those which highlight basic and continued training for literacy teachers.

PNAIC was organized around four central themes: I – continued training of literacy teachers; II – teaching/learning materials, literature, and educational technologies; III – assessment; IV – management, control, and social mobilization (Brasil, 2012a). The guiding documents, however, argue that continued teacher training was the priority theme (Brasil, 2012b, p. 5), and that is the reason for this research.

PNAIC formative meetings were directly aimed at the teachers at locations and times outside the schools, delivered by trainers who were also external to the city’s school system, a scholarship being granted to both teachers and trainers. In 2013, the training focused on literacy; in 2014, the topic was mathematical literacy; in 2015, the number of meetings was reduced and the topics addressed arts, human and nature sciences; in 2016, the number of meetings being once more reduced, assessment was the theme studied. It should be noted that the project’s concept of literacy is wide: it includes the introduction to all curricular contents in the various areas of knowledge and not only the ability to read and write, something that had already been emphasized by the previous national program underway, called Pro-Literacy.

PNAIC was meant to distribute materials among the schools, including child and youth literature and a box with literacy games, designed by the Study Center on Education and Language (CEEL) at the Federal University of Pernambuco (UFPE), in addition to supporting materials for teachers. The training courses addressed points of interest such as the phonological awareness towards literacy, the importance of mastering the social use of written language, and the appreciation of childhood, of games, of *delightful* reading, and playfulness in the pedagogical practices. In addition, the program brought up the notion





of the “right to learn” for discussion, stressing the school’s responsibility “[...] to enforce the right that every child has to learn how to read and write, with autonomy, before turning eight years old” (Brasil, 2015b, p. 46), without neglecting another fundamental right, the right to childhood.

PNAIC began to be implemented in São Paulo’s school system by the end of 2012. It was absorbed as a training policy towards literacy, together with other continued training initiatives, such as the Special Action Project.

Organizing the PNAIC-related actions in the city’s schools was complicated due to the number of participants. In 2013, the school system had approximately 5,016 teachers working on literacy classes, from the 1st to the 3rd grade of Elementary schools (São Paulo, 2014b). The training, however, was optional for the teachers and took place outside the working hours (in most cases, on Saturdays). In addition to the R\$200,00 (around US\$ 92.00 in 2013), scholarship provided by the Ministry of Education, also paid to the Trainers, teachers received a certificate to advance in their career, should they complete the training cycles. The Municipal Education Department utilized the support from the Regional Education Departments to accompany the program, also providing technical help such as registering Trainers and Literacy Teachers in the Ministry of Education’s database; attendance monitoring; payment of scholarships and certification given to participants (São Paulo, 2014b).

The pedagogical coordinators were not summoned to participate in the training courses; therefore, initially, only the teachers had access to materials and discussions provided by PNAIC. The Regional Education Departments sought to fill this gap by providing CPs with concomitant formation initiatives, as CPs felt the need to support literacy teachers in sight of what was demanded by PNAIC, because in addition to attending the courses, teachers had tasks to be conducted in their own classrooms and had to bring back their notes and feedback in the following sessions. Later on, CPs would be included as a target public in the training courses.

## **Women educators, now you have the floor**

The next step in the research was to conduct interviews with the purpose of grasping the meanings teachers had in mind when talking about the two training models. The interviews with literacy teachers were intended to understand how the moments of continued training they took part in where experienced and how the CPs conducted the liaisons and follow-ups. In their speech, one can notice that PEA has a great formative potential and has features that facilitate teachers to join the project, which also enhances their professional development. It takes place in the same environment where teachers find themselves, either before or after class, and within the working hours. In addition, it allows for the groups of educators to direct the training topics towards issues that require greater formative input, which is in line with the assumptions proposed by Imbernón. That is, it enables specific topics to be addressed within each educational context and at each school individually, in contrast to generic formative initiatives that drive away from the teachers’ real needs. Thus, the space PEA opens turns out to be an opportunity to not



only bring up the difficulties found in teaching work, but also to share good practices, exchange information with other teachers, and plan together the actions that will be directed at each class/student.

The teachers we listened to in this research said the pedagogical coordinators were well acquainted with the classroom everyday routine and, for this reason, they were in a better position to question the pedagogical practices, requesting the literacy teachers only for what they would be able to meet. As one of the interviewees puts it: “[...] in PEA, you are there with your pedagogical coordinator, who knows your students, their family, the school’s reality, what the school is able to provide. He will not ask you for anything beyond what you can really give” (Literacy teacher 1). The account brings indications that the teacher and the CP enjoy a close relationship, and this allows the expectancies of them both to be aligned. However, this view could lead to a conservative understanding of the school ambience, in which unspoken agreements among the professionals involved in the educational task are more prone to justify the work they do with the limitations they face, and then they are little encouraged to tackle more clearly and through a shared effort the most adequate strategies to overcome the students’ difficulties and the dissatisfactory learning achievements.

The fact that not all teachers choose the full-time working hours, which includes time for formation, makes it really difficult to obtain a truly cooperative teamwork that would be comprehensive of the whole faculty. This forces pedagogical coordinators to face the challenge of finding other means to access the entire group.

Whoever is in JEIF (full-time working hours), we manage to have a broader dialogue; but, if the teacher is not in JEIF, I have to knock at the door, eventually interrupt class or then ask for 10 minutes during coffee break, and ask the truant officer to hold the children. (Pedagogical Coordinator 1).

There are also other elements that hinder the project. The topics listed for study at PEA could become isolated issues, for which the pedagogical coordinator not always has appropriate background. Although the project is designed around formative demands indicated by each school, once these demands are processed by the regional bodies, they end up being changed into a specific plan with preset topics, including phases, stages, and bibliography previously defined. Even if it is possible to adapt some elements along the itinerary while the training is being developed, they are constructed before raising the issues that may occur along the school year, which turns the project similar to an ordinary course plan or program.

The indications supplied by PEA not always are sufficient to clarify the CP, as for example, when dealing with the complex topic of disabled students, constantly demanded by the entire school system, or when there are issues associated with specific approaches required by the curricular components. Let us remember that an CP has, in principle, the title of a generalist pedagogue or graduated in a specific discipline, followed by specialization in the educational area. Thus, he often is required to search the internet



for study materials that will stimulate the discussions with the teachers, which does not necessarily lead to innovating results in relation to teaching practices.

Moreover, the pedagogical coordinators participating in this research point the need to look for methodologies to conduct the PEAs so that they will effectively contribute to improve ways of teaching. According to the group of interviewees, passive methodologies are prevailing in the training courses, such as reading, video screening, discussions on teaching practices.

Because it is quite big, I think we take a book and start reading it, each teacher reads a stretch of it; 15 minutes later half of the group has fallen asleep. It is something that bothers me. It is not something that you start reading and then you and the others talk about. It is not. They [the teachers] are not participative regarding this aspect. As we have already experienced that, we have seldom done it, I mean, bringing a book. We have already kind of aborted this technique. (Pedagogical Coordinators 2).

The bibliographical review of training policies reveals this type of approach is unfruitful, as there is little or no teacher intervention (Gatti; Barretto, 2009). Professional development requires more intricate strategies, supported by more consistent efforts in the search for new ways to overcome the students' difficulties and improve education quality. It involves discussing mistakes and successes confronting what the studies point out, in dialogue with the guidance provided by the local educational departments and with the consequences observed in practice. This search process is not limited to the methodological framework. It encompasses a broader perspective towards the cultural approaches that take into account the multiple dimensions of the students' development, resorting to the contribution offered by the several fields of knowledge and the support by the school management. These paths have to be experienced, tested and reviewed by the schools, which is far away from mere sessions of reading and random comments during the hours of collective pedagogical work.

This is not a fantasy and, sometimes, it has been going on at some schools. One of the teachers interviewed pointed the active involvement of the faculty in designing and implementing the PEA:

I used to attend it in the morning and now I am attending it in the evening. I have already experienced PEA with a number of different CPs. Each one has their own way. All of them give you a lot. But there is a great deal of reading. The videos, as the years go by, have been increasing. [...] And the two things are good, everything is an aid. And the radical change I realized when I shifted to the evening group was related to something more democratic, the teachers manage to participate a little more, including the very design of the project, in reorganizing the project. As of right now: we had an assessment at the end and we realized that some things had not gone as we imagined. So the group managed to reorganize all that together. It was not something the CP would have to do alone. It was something really democratic. It was really cool, a fulfilling experience. (Literacy teacher 2).



The narrative indicates that the active interested participation of teachers by means of collaborative work is reflected in improvement of the proposal, shared responsibility, and commitment to the arrangements made, as a result of the group's assessment.

In spite of the privileged space for reflection with the group of teachers – a strategy with high formative value –, Rego and Mello (apud Gatti; Barretto, 2009) warn against the risks a training takes when it is limited to one school environment. If such model is adopted, limiting the reflection to a single school “[...] does not responds to the systemic needs to induce changes with certain social urgency and width to reach out the faculty in its entirety, whose quantitative dimension is of great importance” (Gatti; Barretto, 2009, p. 203). Scholars also advocate that the formative processes must be accompanied by structural and institutional conditions suitable to bring changes forth; this can be accomplished in environments that stimulate teamwork, upon shared democratic management, as well as upon adequate substantial working conditions.

In São Paulo city's school system, its dimension as a huge network is envisaged in the Special Action Plan (PEA). As already mentioned, it allows for the training to be centered around the issues on a per school basis and, at the same time, it is useful to implement the school system's policies. Yet, its operating routines hinder the construction of new practices that reverberate into better learning conditions for the students. Reflecting in relatively small groups at school does not ensure a fruitful dialogue with the teaching practices; there is a risk of missing the point, that is, to ensure that all students learn, which will somehow dilute the basic commitments to the educational agenda, regardless of the topic listed to be addressed by the project. Another weakness lies in the fact that the formative action requires other types of input in order to yield really improved practices. In addition, the CP gets overloaded and would hardly be able to satisfactorily accompany the pedagogical work of teachers and make room to perform significant interventions.

Regarding PNAIC, it was virtually reduced to a teacher training given by a professional with specific skills for such, being supported by study materials, readings, and playful materials for the students. The large-scale assessment, intended especially for 3rd graders (National Literacy Assessment (Avaliação Nacional da Alfabetização (ANA))), was devised with the purpose of exactly monitoring the learning results at this stage, as the flip side of the inputs represented by the literacy programs.

The interviews have shown that a significant aspect of the PNAIC project was to recover the importance of playfulness in literacy, taking into consideration the ways of being a child at this schooling level. Although there are hints that the pact was not understood as an innovation of the teaching practices and that it did not engage the school system in its context, a highlight in the interviews is that the project, to a certain extent, contributed to consolidate the knowledge acquired in previous literacy programs. Teachers say that blending the previous trainings with those provided by PNAIC was fruitful as they took advantage of the most significant features of each of them, regardless of the theoretical framework underpinning the various programs even if, sometimes, they disagreed in some aspects or focus.



I participated in the PROFA training and I think it really helped us broaden our perspective in terms of literacy. And I just go on, I think we mix up a lot. I say that when mixing up, you are trying. Because in the classroom, heterogeneous as it is, you try. You work with a student in a certain way, then you try in a different manner with another student, in an effort to make them move forward. (Literacy teacher 2).

The account above reveals that blending the contents of different trainings meets the criterion of practicality, that is, it looks for ways that will lead students to achieve positive results, which happens in eclectic fashions. The teacher turns to the previous experience they have and seeks to integrate it with those presented in the latest training, recording some practices that yield advancement and, for this reason, provide better conditions to perform their job. In turn, this context reveals that there is no clarity regarding the cornerstone underpinning literacy culminating in erratic processes of trial-and-error, which are different from approaches whose purpose is to acknowledge the individuality of itineraries and strategies that are adequate to each student.

Gatti and Barretto (2009, p. 216) observed that:

Over the years, testing the practical usefulness and working conditions, it was possible to acknowledge that some changes proposed remain, while others are modified when absorbed the knowledge and skills teachers have constructed along their professional trajectory, and other changes disappear.

Finally, an extremely relevant point concerning the continued training programs, is the need of policies that provide support to their implementation and continuity. With PNAIC, and considering that literacy is a national demand, it is appropriate to establish teacher training programs in the several administrative levels for the purpose of meeting such necessity, since states and cities have technical capacity and educational proposals that are immensely varied and they quite often resent the absence of training programs. Even so, and no matter how well designed the programs may be, it is during their implementation that the challenges come up, the specificities of the territories, the *clashes* with local projects and previous programs. Researches have demonstrated that the policies that support the implementation are more important than where the program comes from – the federal, regional or local level. The liaisons taking place at the schools will be able to ensure not only the success of the proposals, but also their effectiveness and maintenance. Evidence also indicates a gradual detachment from the influence of these interventions over the years while other policies and programs are applied in order to replace the previous ones.

In most cases, there is evidence that the teacher's pedagogical practices go through some of the changes intended along the formation process. However, once the training is completed, the tendency is a reduced permanence of the new practices, or even the appropriation is such that they are no longer recognized. (Gatti; Barretto, 2009, p. 209).



A common weakness among the programs, which we have found in the cases analyzed here, is the discontinuity due to political changes from an administration to the other; this makes teachers have a feeling of discredit. In relation to PEA, as much as the project has remained the same since it was created, it transpires that upon the change of the regulatory benchmarks (ordinances and normative instructions), it is possible to identify the hallmarks of the current political management.

In education, any change or intervention does not yield immediate results. The temporality to achieve results in a certain direction has to be taken into consideration. That is why discontinued policies and actions are harmful, because they interrupt processes that start to be meaningful and consolidate for the people involved with school education. (Gatti; Barretto, 2009, p. 234).

The interviews with the pedagogical coordinators revealed great concern with continued teacher training; however, the greatest challenges come from this group. CPs showed they were concerned about motivating teachers to attend the formation moments; about implementing methodologies with contributions to the teaching practices; about problematizing internal and external assessments; and, finally, they were concerned with providing moments to follow up each class individually, in order to get to know more closely who were the students that need more input to reach the proposed educational objectives. In this respect, they highlighted the importance of teachers recording their activities as a follow-up tool for the pedagogical coordination.

The interview with the formation trainers working for the regional bodies revealed that they understand continued teacher training as a process which accumulates knowledge and skills originating from pedagogical practices and programs. They are willing to provide pedagogical coordinators with tools so that CPs will work more effectively towards teacher training as they acknowledge it as their primary job. Furthermore, trainers conceded that PEA was the space to implement the policies defined by the school system, which, in the years of this research and in relation to literacy, had been PNAIC and, speaking more generally, the Program More Education São Paulo (set forth by Municipal Decree No. 54,452, of 2013).

Yes, it is intended to engage in a discussion and appropriation of the guidelines set by the Municipal Education Department, and when I mention that, it is not about agreeing with everything, but rather debate, it is to see what is important, what is significant, and also absorb it. The pedagogical coordinator has elements he can discuss at their school, talking to teachers, to the employees about what is to be done so that these principles are enforced. (Formation trainer from a regional body).

By comparing the interviews with the discussions resulting from the documental and bibliographical review, it transpires that CPs, despite the difficulties they face, play a central role in implementing the training policies, either federal or local, at the schools. The work CPs do with the group of teachers allows the continued training to become an important tool for the teachers who seek to improve their practices associated



with the quality of education, considering the specificities of each educational context. Consequently, “[...] grounded on the complex problematic educational situations, [CPs may] help create alternatives for changes in the context where education really takes place” (Imbernón, 2010, p. 55).

### **In summary**

The study highlights the potential work pedagogical coordinators can do with literacy teachers and calls into question the formative policies that are introduced to teachers, both on the federal and on the local level. It points out the limitations of the CP work, including the extensive and assorted list of assignments to this job; the emergency situations they are called to tackle at the schools; insufficient time for the follow-up of the classes.

Despite the challenges, PEA shows to be a privileged space for continued teacher training, something that is not equally ensured in other local school networks. That is why PEA should be valued and improved, maintaining its systemic dimensions for discussion and appropriation of the guidelines defined by and to the network as a whole. At the same time, it should comprehend the formative demands arising from each school. The limitations lie in the fact that not all teachers take part in the training, which has an impact on the pedagogical coordination; due to its structure and the way it is conducted, which does not prioritize the right to learn of all students, regardless of the topics addressed; also how the training is carried out since it does not necessarily problematize the practices as well as the collective leading role of the teachers.

In relation to PNAIC in the São Paulo city’s school system, the research indicated that, even though it is a pact that involved a number of joint action, there was an almost exclusive prevalence of in-service training. There are no indications that PNAIC has caused remarkable changes in teaching practices, considering the difficulty to disseminate what had been learned by voluntary teachers to the entire faculty at their schools, as well as there was no dialogue with a consistent formative itinerary for literacy in the school system and with the knowledge and skills acquired by the teachers. The fact of being optional for teachers, conducted outside the school environment and have not included, since the very beginning, the pedagogical coordinator, may have been a difficult factor in being absorbed by the entire school system. Although the pact has been officially added as a formation policy for literacy teachers, the research has brought up indications that there was no close dialogue with PEAs, as the latter followed their routine itineraries in parallel with the development of PNAIC. However, PEAs seem to have somehow contributed to disseminate the actions of the pact brought by the teachers who took the training courses.

It is assumed, therefore, that the two training models can potentially transform the teaching work, provided that they interact with the practices that take place in the classrooms and provided that they get regular and systematic support from the management bodies in order to resolve impasses, overcome shortcoming, and upholding the advancements. It is also assumed how important it is to direct teachers towards a



shared construction of their own training in service, understood as part of their profession as teachers, of which they are subjects rather than mere objects.

Even so, full literacy for children is not an issue easy to tackle only through continued teacher training, since it requires a set of combined actions and a collective effort to overcome learning barriers, including providing recovery in parallel to students who need an extra input.

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