

Travessias da temporalidade e cartografias da saúde mental: bidirecionalidade do cuidado na docência

Traversals of Temporality and Cartographies of Mental Health: The Bidirectionality of Care in Teaching

Travesías de la temporalidad y cartografías de la salud mental: la bidireccionalidad del cuidado en la docencia

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RESUMO

Este artigo propõe compreender a docência na Educação Infantil como uma travessia pela temporalidade do espaço educativo, tomando o filme *Interestelar* (2014), obra relevante da ficção científica, como metáfora e operador analítico para pensar as narrativas de professoras acerca do cotidiano escolar, das temporalidades do ensinar, dos afetos e das implicações desse trabalho para a saúde mental docente. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, de inspiração cartográfica, realizada a partir de entrevistas semiestruturadas com dez professoras atuantes na Educação Infantil. A análise do material empírico foi orientada pela análise textual discursiva, articulando os movimentos de unitarização, categorização e comunicação, em diálogo com uma escrita poético-reflexiva. Os resultados evidenciam que o trabalho docente se constitui na tessitura entre fazer e sentir, revelando o tempo da docência como relativo e atravessado por improvisos, vínculos afetivos e práticas de cuidado que se estabelecem de modo bidirecional entre professoras e crianças, sustentando aprendizagens, modos de permanecer no trabalho e processos de saúde mental no cotidiano da Educação Infantil. Conclui-se que a cartografia das narrativas permitiu mapear essas travessias, afirmando a docência na Educação Infantil como prática ética, política e produtora de sentidos para o cuidado e a saúde mental das professoras.

Palavras-chave: Cartografia; Docência; Educação Infantil; Saúde Mental; Temporalidades.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to understand teaching in Early Childhood Education as a journey through the temporality of the educational space, using the film *Interstellar* (2014), a significant work of science fiction, as a metaphor and analytical operator for examining

teachers' narratives about everyday school life, the temporalities of teaching, affects, and the implications of this work for teachers' mental health. This is a qualitative study, inspired by the cartographic approach, conducted through semi-structured interviews with ten teachers working in Early Childhood Education. The analysis of the empirical material was guided by discursive textual analysis, articulating the movements of unitarization, categorization, and communication, in dialogue with a poetic-reflective form of writing. The results show that teaching work is constituted in the interweaving of doing and feeling, revealing teaching time as relative and permeated by improvisations, affective bonds, and practices of care that are established in a bidirectional manner between teachers and children, sustaining learning processes, ways of remaining in the profession, and mental health processes in everyday Early Childhood Education. The study concludes that cartographing these narratives made it possible to trace such journeys, affirming teaching in Early Childhood Education as an ethical and political practice and as a producer of meanings for care and teachers' mental health.

Keywords: Cartography; Teaching; Early Childhood Education; Mental Health; Temporality.

RESUMEN

Este artículo propone comprender la docencia en la Educación Infantil como una travesía a través de la temporalidad del espacio educativo, tomando la película *Interestelar* (2014), obra relevante de la ciencia ficción, como metáfora y operador analítico para pensar las narrativas de profesoras sobre la vida cotidiana escolar, las temporalidades de la enseñanza, los afectos y las implicaciones de este trabajo para la salud mental docente. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, de inspiración cartográfica, realizada a partir de entrevistas semiestructuradas con diez profesoras que actúan en la Educación Infantil. El análisis del material empírico se orientó por el análisis textual discursivo, articulando los movimientos de unitarización, categorización y comunicación, en diálogo con una escritura poético-reflexiva. Los resultados evidencian que el trabajo docente se constituye en la trama entre hacer y sentir, revelando el tiempo de la docencia como relativo y atravesado por improvisaciones, vínculos afectivos y prácticas de cuidado que se establecen de manera bidireccional entre profesoras y niños, sosteniendo aprendizajes, modos de permanencia en el trabajo y procesos de salud mental en el cotidiano de la Educación Infantil. Se concluye que la cartografía de las narrativas permitió mapear estas travesías, afirmando la docencia en la Educación Infantil como una práctica ética y política, productora de sentidos para el cuidado y la salud mental de las profesoras.

Palabras clave: Cartografía; Docencia; Educación Infantil; Salud Mental; Temporalidad.

Starting coordinate¹: openings of rifts in space-time

Teaching in Early Childhood Education can be understood as a crossing through multiple dimensions of the educational space-time. Just as in an interstellar journey, teaching work requires a willingness to explore territories constituted by relationships, affects, and the everyday experiences of teaching young children. In this crossing, time does not present itself in a linear or measurable form, but as lived duration, marked by intensities and events that leave traces in teachers' memory, in children's formative trajectory, and in the mental health of those who teach.

Empirical research has shown that mental illness among teachers constitutes a phenomenon of considerable magnitude and complexity. Systematic review studies in the Brazilian context indicate that the prevalence of burnout syndrome among teachers can range between 63.5% and 93%, with particularly high levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced sense of professional accomplishment (Silva et al., 2023). Investigations also point out that a significant proportion of teachers present symptoms related to burnout, including elevated levels of low professional accomplishment (28.9%) and emotional exhaustion associated with working conditions (Gomes et al., 2023). Along these lines, the international scenario, through reports by UNESCO (2023) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022), points to a global crisis in the teaching profession, marked by work intensification, staff shortages, and significant impacts on mental health.

In more recent national studies, with broad samples of Basic Education teachers, consistent indicators of psychological distress, health-related leaves of absence, and the use of anxiolytic and antidepressant medication have been identified, evidencing the impact of working conditions on teachers' mental health (Assunção; Maia, 2025). Such data reinforce that teaching working conditions and the precarization of professional working conditions constitute central elements in the process of illness, indicating that mental health involves subjective, relational, and structural dimensions.

This shift in perspective allows us to understand that teaching does not mobilize only technical or pedagogical competencies, but implies profound subjective involvement, in which the act of teaching is intertwined with feeling, caring, and sustaining bonds. It is a living human practice, crossed by ethical, affective, and political challenges that bear directly on mental health, especially in Early Childhood Education, where the relational dimension is central.

In this movement, the metaphor of the film *Interstellar* (2014) becomes central as an analytical operator for thinking about teaching as a crossing through educational

¹ The notion of "coordinate" is used in this article as a cartographic and metaphorical operator, inspired both by the perspective of cartography as an intervention-research method and by the space-time metaphor mobilized by the film *Interstellar* (2014). Unlike sequential numbering, the coordinates indicate provisional positions in the field of experience investigated, orienting the reading without hierarchizing or linearizing the analyzed processes.

space-time. By tensioning conventional notions of time, presence, and bonding, the cinematic narrative makes it possible to understand teaching work as a relational experience in which care is not established unidirectionally, but circulates between teachers and children, configuring a bidirectionality that sustains learning, bonds, and modes of subjectivation.

The relativity of time, the film's central axis, allows us to think of teaching as a practice whose effects extend beyond the present and are inscribed silently and enduringly. Everyday gestures, often invisible, reverberate in the subjective constitution of children and of the teachers themselves, affecting their ways of existing, feeling, and caring for themselves at work. From this perspective, teaching affirms itself as an ethical, affective, and political practice, committed to the production of meanings and to care strategies that make it possible to remain in everyday school life.

The film *Interstellar* (2014), directed by Christopher Nolan, narrates the journey of a group of astronauts who, faced with the environmental collapse of Earth, undertake an interstellar mission in search of new habitable planets. The narrative is crossed by concepts from modern physics, such as the relativity of time, wormholes, understood as shortcuts connecting different points in space-time, and the experience of navigating unknown territories. Throughout the plot, time does not present itself linearly, being affected by gravity and by the conditions of the planets explored, which produces temporal mismatches between the characters. These elements are not mobilized here in their physical rigor, but as metaphorical operators that make it possible to think of teaching as a crossing, of bonds as connections that traverse time, and of everyday school life as a space of unpredictability and discovery.

It is from the metaphor of the film *Interstellar* (2014) that this article's guiding question is outlined: in what way do the experiences lived in the everyday practice of teaching in Early Childhood Education, crossed by affects, temporalities, and practices of care, relate to teachers' mental health? The aim is to analyze how teachers' narratives reveal ways of living time, of caring for oneself, and of doing educational work, understanding mental health as a relational process situated in the space-time of Early Childhood Education. To this end, the study is anchored in a qualitative approach, which takes the interviews as encounters of listening and conversation, conceived as devices for the production of narratives and for the elaboration of lived experience, making it possible to follow the meanings, affects, and temporalities that cross teaching experience.

Orientation coordinate: cartographies of the crossings in space-time

In the Brazilian context, Early Childhood Education is recognized as the first stage of Basic Education, in accordance with the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (*Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* – Law No. 9,394/1996), being a right of the child and a duty of the State. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (*Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação*

Infantil – DCNEI, 2009) reaffirm this conception by recognizing the child as a historical subject with rights, who builds their identity through interactions, play, and experiences lived in educational spaces. The National Common Curricular Base (*Base Nacional Comum Curricular* – BNCC, 2018), in turn, emphasizes the inseparability of educating and caring, recognizing childhood as a time in its own right, not subject to productivist logic or to the anticipation of school content.

This inseparability is not restricted to children, but also runs through the teachers' work, requiring attention to the subjective, affective, and institutional dimensions that sustain teaching practice. Dimenstein (2008) points out that work in intensely relational contexts, such as education, involves strong subjective implication, making mental health a central element for understanding professional practice. Thinking about teaching in Early Childhood Education therefore implies considering not only what is taught, but how the work is lived, which affects circulate, and which self-care strategies are produced in everyday life.

In light of these legal and conceptual frameworks, this article understands teaching in Early Childhood Education as a practice that articulates pedagogical, experiential, and affective knowledge, understanding teaching as the production of meanings, legacies, and ways of caring for oneself in professional practice (Saviani, 2011). In this context, teachers' writing and records take on a formative and elaborative role, functioning as devices for reflection and care, by making it possible to revisit lived experience and to produce knowledge about one's own trajectory.

By mobilizing the metaphor of the interstellar journey, inspired by the film *Interstellar* (2014), the study tensions instrumental and linear conceptions of time, teaching, and learning, moving closer to a qualitative reading that recognizes educational time as relative, intensive, and crossed by affects, memories, and events. This shift makes it possible to understand teaching as a potential space for producing either health or suffering, depending on the ethical, political, and institutional conditions that cross teaching work.

From this perspective, teaching is affirmed as a crossing through educational space-time, in which everyday gestures produce effects that extend beyond the instant in which they occur. This means recognizing Early Childhood Education as an ethical, aesthetic, and political field, in which teaching knowledge, foundational educational experiences, and self-care practices implicated in teachers' mental health are produced.

Although this study emphasizes the relational and affective dimension of teaching in Early Childhood Education as a constitutive element of mental health, it is essential to recognize that this phenomenon is not exhausted by experiences lived within the school. Contemporary literature shows that teachers' mental health is deeply crossed by structural working conditions, such as the precarization of labor relations, the intensification and overload of activities, professional devaluation, and growing pressure for results, factors that extend beyond the school space and bear directly on

teachers' well-being (Lopes; Novais, 2023). In this sense, understanding teachers' mental health implies adopting a broader perspective, one that articulates subjective, relational, and structural dimensions, avoiding reducing it exclusively to the affective experiences lived in everyday educational life.

Relativity of time, teacher memory, and self-care

The time lived in teaching is not organized according to the chronological linearity of school calendars, but as a subjective experience crossed by affects, events, and intensities. Larrosa (2019) states that experience is that which "happens to us, occurs to us, touches us," and not that which is reduced to the measurable. In Early Childhood Education, this dimension becomes evident, since small everyday gestures, a welcoming gesture, attentive listening, a shared game, can produce lasting marks on the constitution of children and on the psychic and affective balance of teachers.

The metaphor of the relativity of time, inspired by Interstellar, helps us understand that not every educational event carries the same formative or subjective weight. Benjamin (2015) contributes by conceiving memory not as a reconstitution of the past, but as a narrative elaboration of lived experience, in which certain moments gain density when revisited. In this process, teachers' memory transforms experience into knowledge and into a possibility for self-care, making it possible to recognize everyday school life as a legitimate field for the production of knowledge and subjective elaboration.

Tardif (2014) reinforces this perspective by affirming that teaching knowledge is temporal, built up over the course of one's professional trajectory from the concrete experience of work. Bringing this understanding into dialogue with Foucault (2004), it is possible to understand remembrance and writing about practice as exercises in self-care, in which the subject turns to their own experience in an ethical and political way, producing more sustainable ways of existing at work.

Exploring unknown planets: learning as discovery

Teaching can be understood as a permanent process of exploring unknown educational territories (Tardif, 2014). Each group of children, each institutional context, and each pedagogical situation configures a singular field, crossed by unpredictability and challenges. Zabalza (2018) highlights that Early Childhood Education is characterized by the complexity of everyday life and by the need for a reflective, sensitive practice that is open to the unexpected.

From this perspective, learning ceases to be mere transmission of content and comes to be understood as discovery and the construction of meanings. Larrosa (2019) emphasizes that learning implies exposure to the new and the uncertain. The metaphor of exploring unknown planets makes it possible to understand teaching as an investigative practice, in which the teacher observes, records, interprets, and reorients her actions based on the experiences lived with children.

Everyday pedagogical records take on, in this context, a central role. According to Zabalza (2018), they do not serve merely to document activities, but function as "provisional maps" that favor reflection and guide future decisions, without rigidly fixing the educational path. These records constitute memories that extend beyond the immediate space-time of teaching and sustain the narratives that teachers build about their own professional trajectory.

Wormholes: connections between knowledge and affects

Educational processes are not organized in a fragmented way, but through connections between knowledge, experiences, affects, and times. The metaphor of wormholes makes it possible to understand how certain educational experiences articulate past, present, and future, shortening the distances between what has been lived, what has been experienced, and what may yet emerge.

Deleuze (2011) contributes by conceiving time as multiplicity and the event as that which erupts, producing new meanings. In teaching in Early Childhood Education, these connections manifest in a privileged way in affective relationships, in play, and in the narratives of everyday school life. Benjamin (2015) points out that narrative preserves the singularity of lived experience, allowing different times to coexist in the present. As the author states, "the storyteller leaves marks on the experience he transmits, weaving a web of meanings that sustains memory and the continuity of what has been lived" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 109).

Navigation coordinate: orbits of the research (bidirectionality of care)

This study is situated in the field of qualitative research, understood not only as an investigative strategy, but as an ethical-political practice of listening and of producing meanings about teaching experience. By focusing on the narratives of Early Childhood Education teachers, the research is guided by the understanding that educational work is crossed by affects, intensities, and modes of suffering and care that bear directly on teachers' mental health. From this perspective, investigating teaching implies recognizing suffering not as an individualized or pathologizing dimension, but as a situated experience, produced within the social, institutional, and political relations that configure everyday school life.

Within this horizon, the research was guided by the question of how the experiences lived in the everyday practice of teaching in Early Childhood Education, crossed by affects, temporalities, and practices of care, relate to teachers' mental health. Taking this problem as its axis, the study aimed to analyze how teachers' narratives express ways of living time, of caring for oneself, and of doing educational work, understanding mental health as a relational process situated in the space-time of Early Childhood Education. This orientation justified the choice of a qualitative approach, anchored in interviews conceived as encounters of listening and conversation, understood as devices capable of following the meanings, affects, and temporalities that cross teaching experience.

In light of Sawaia's (2009) contributions, the suffering experienced in the exercise of teaching can be understood as ethical-political suffering, that is, as an expression of the social contradictions that cross educational work, producing both wear and possibilities for resistance and creation. This understanding shifts the analysis of teachers' mental health away from individualizing approaches toward a reading that articulates subjectivity, work, and institutional conditions, recognizing the teacher as a historical subject implicated in relations of power, care, and responsibility.

It is within this horizon that cartography presents itself as an intervention-research method (Passos; Barros, 2020; Scherer, 2022), by making it possible to follow the subjective, affective, and institutional processes that cross teaching. Rather than seeking to measure symptoms or classify psychic states, cartography allows for the mapping of movements of suffering, care, creation, and resistance, understanding mental health as a process in becoming, produced in the relations and encounters that make up the space-time of Early Childhood Education.

In this way, the research orbits are configured as an exercise in following teaching experience, coherent with the article's theoretical-poetic proposal and with the understanding of teaching in Early Childhood Education as a crossing, a production of meanings, and a construction of knowledge over time. From this perspective, mapping implies sustaining an ethical and sensitive posture toward experience, attentive to the movements, intensities, and affects that cross the field researched. For Tedesco, Sade, and Caliman (2014), cartography understands research as the shared production of meanings, rather than as a simple representation of a given reality.

The research was developed within the scope of an ongoing institutional project, duly registered and approved by a Research Ethics Committee², in compliance with the ethical precepts that guide studies with human subjects. The encounter with the teachers took place through systematic visits to Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers in a municipality in the Southwest region of the state of Paraná, carried out over three months, in 2025. These visits aimed to bring the researcher closer to the everyday practice of teaching in Early Childhood Education, through sensitive observation of pedagogical practices, school routines, and the relationships established in educational spaces.

In all, 12 Early Childhood Education institutions were visited. During this process, teachers were invited to take part in the study, after being informed of the research objectives and the ethical procedures involved. Ten teachers³, with more than five years of effective experience in Early Childhood Education, expressed interest and availability to take part in the interviews, signing the Informed Consent Form.

² Research project: *Subjetividade na contemporaneidade: eu e o eu social* (Center for Human Sciences at Unioeste, 2023–2026). Registered with Plataforma Brasil – CAAE – 68484023.8.0000.0107.

³ The term teachers (*professoras*, feminine plural) is used because all the participants who agreed to take part in the research identified as women, which gave the study an empirical scope composed exclusively of subjects of the female gender.

The choice of the interview, conceived as a dialogue in the form of conversation, sought to foster an investigative field open to narrating, to sharing experiences, and to dialogical conversation. This way of proceeding was agreed upon based on the establishment of *rapport*⁴, so that teachers could feel welcomed in the interaction-research process when expressing their subjectivity in relation to teaching work. The "meeting to talk about" was intended to analyze how self-care and teaching work intertwine, in a logic of crossing through the space-time of teaching, marked by the encounter of subjectivities and temporalities (Freyesleben, 2019).

The interviews were conducted during the teachers' *hora-atividade*⁵, the time period allotted for pedagogical planning, which made it possible to hold the meetings without interfering with activities with the children. The dialogues took place in reserved spaces within the institutions themselves, generally rooms designated for planning, configuring themselves as places of pause, listening, and elaboration of teaching experience, with an average duration of 50 minutes.

As part of the encounter device, participants were offered the possibility of listening to the soundtrack of the film *Interstellar* (2014)⁶, composed by Hans Zimmer, offered to participants as a resource for affective atmosphere-setting to favor listening, remembrance, and the narration of teaching experience, just as the savoring of a mate⁷ was also part of these encounters. Below, Figure 1 is presented, which symbolically illustrates the scene of the encounter between researcher and teacher during the interviews.

⁴ Expression of French origin ("to create a relationship"). Originating in psychological science, used to designate the technique of creating an empathetic connection with another person, so that they communicate with less resistance.

⁵ **Translator's note:** *Hora-atividade* is a portion of Brazilian teachers' paid working hours legally reserved for lesson planning, grading, and other pedagogical tasks performed outside the classroom, guaranteed by federal law (Law No. 11,738/2008) as a set percentage of the total contracted workload.

⁶ Listening playlist used as a methodological device in the interviews:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4y33h81phKU>.

⁷ **Translator's note:** *Mate* (or *chimarrão*) is a traditional infused beverage made from yerba mate leaves, widely consumed in southern Brazil and other parts of South America. It is typically shared among a group from a hollowed gourd (*cuia*), drunk through a metal straw (*bomba*), and carries strong social and cultural significance as a ritual of conversation and hospitality.

Figure 1 - Cartographic encounter between researcher and teacher



Source: Elaborated by the author (2025).

The image seeks to visually translate the relational and situated character of the research, highlighting the interview as a space of listening, sharing, and the production of meanings. The scratch-like mark evokes the idea of process, incompleteness, and movement, aspects that are central to both cartography and the discursive textual analysis adopted in the study. Everyday elements, such as the *chimarrão* gourd and the thermos, symbolize the affective and cultural dimension that runs through the encounter and sustains the construction of teachers' narratives. Teachers were invited to speak freely about their experience in teaching, the meanings attributed to their work, the affects involved in everyday school life, and the meanings constructed throughout their professional trajectory, making it possible to cartographically trace their experimentations in the field of teaching within a space-time nexus (Maman, 2025; Scherer, 2022).

In this context, the interview was constituted as a space of encounter and narrative crossing, in which chronological time gave way to lived time, allowing memories, emotions, and events to emerge in a temporality of their own. In dialogue with Foucault (2004), especially regarding the notion of self-care, the narrative of teaching experience is understood as a reflective and ethical practice, involving relations with oneself, with the other, with time, and with work, enabling teachers to elaborate lived experience, resignify experiences, and produce singular modes of sustaining mental health in everyday school life.

The conduct of the interviews privileged an open and implicated form of listening, favoring the narration of trajectories, formative experiences, and everyday experiences in Early Childhood Education. Throughout this process, the researcher adopted a stance of implication with the field, recognizing herself as part of the investigative process, in accordance with the ethical and epistemological assumptions of cartography (Passos; Barros, 2020).

In analytical-methodological terms, the analysis of the material produced was carried out from a poetic-reflective approach, guided by the identification of scenes, narrative fragments, and events expressive of discovery, bonding, care, and teaching improvisation. These elements were understood as units of meaning emerging from experience, constituting temporal and affective records of lived experience, interpreted metaphorically as journeys through educational space-time. On several occasions, teachers drew on their field diaries to recall classes and pedagogical situations, evidencing the documentary importance of these records as repositories of significant space-times of professional-social life (Zabalza, 2018).

The analytical path was organized into three movements, inspired by the stages of Discursive Textual Analysis (*Análise Textual Discursiva* – ATD): unitarization, categorization, and communication, reinterpreted in this study as analytical orbits aimed at mapping the intensities, affects, and meanings of teaching experience in Early Childhood Education. Unitarization consisted of identifying scenes, narrative fragments, and significant events, understood as expressive units of teachers' lived experience. Categorization occurred through establishing approximations between these units, not with the intent of fixing rigid categories, but of composing fields of resonance between experiences, allowing for the emergence of interpretive nuclei related to temporalities, affects, and teaching knowledge. This movement is in dialogue with cartography as an intervention-research method, by following ongoing processes and their variations (Passos; Barros, 2020). The table below outlines the research orbit, that is, its trajectory in the educational field.

Table 1- Research orbits: articulation between Discursive Textual Analysis and the cartography of teaching experience.

ATD Stages	Analytical Orbits of the Research	Procedures Carried Out	Meanings Produced
<i>Unitarization</i>	Capturing intensities	Identification of scenes, narrative fragments, and significant events in the interviews	Emergence of affects, lived temporalities, and singular experiences of teaching work
<i>Categorization</i>	Fields of resonance	Interpretive grouping of units of meaning by thematic, temporal, and affective approximation	Composition of meaning nuclei related to teaching, self-care, time, and ways of living the work
<i>Communication</i>	Orbital narratives	Elaboration of theoretically articulated analytical-poetic texts	Production of situated, shareable knowledge implicated with mental health and the ethics of care in teaching

Source: Elaborated by the author (2026).

Consequently, the communication of results took place through the elaboration of analytical-poetic narratives, in which the meanings produced were theoretically articulated and presented in a way that preserved the singularity of the experiences and the density of the events. According to Minayo (2016), this procedure recognizes that interpretation is constitutive of qualitative research, rather than a later or neutral stage.

In this sense, teachers' mental health is understood not as an individual state or as the absence of suffering, but as a relational process, produced within the fabric of everyday school life, in affective bonds, and in the possibilities for listening, creation, and self-recognition at work. The interviews were thus configured as devices of self-care and of elaboration of lived experience, in which narrating, remembering, and reflecting on teaching experience operated as practices of meaning production, subjective sustainment, and the affirmation of life in educational work.

Exploration coordinate: analysis of the temporalities of experiences

The aim was to follow the meanings produced in teachers' narratives, identifying scenes, metaphors, and events that reveal ways of living time, teaching, and relationships in Early Childhood Education. In this movement, narratives are also understood as spaces for elaborating lived experience, in which experiences of wear, care, creation, and the sustaining of mental health in the exercise of teaching are expressed. The data further show that care is not established in a single direction, but circulates bidirectionally between teachers and children, constituting itself as a shared experimentation that sustains learning, bonds, and mental health itself in the everyday life of Early Childhood Education.

This section returns to the metaphorical axes presented earlier: crossing, unknown planets, wormholes, and the relativity of time, now no longer as purely theoretical operators, but as analytical categories constructed in the encounter with the empirical data. This return is not configured as repetition or circularity, but as a spiral movement, in which the concepts return displaced, densified, and crossed by the teachers' narratives. In this sense, the metaphor of space-time operates as a device for reading and interpreting teaching experiences, making it possible to follow the processes of meaning production, care, and mental health as they emerge in the everyday life of Early Childhood Education.

Even though such situations may be recognized as recurrent in the everyday life of Early Childhood Education, their analytical relevance, in this study, does not lie in their exceptionality, but in the way they are given meaning by teachers, revealing modes of relating to time, planning, and the unpredictable, which bear on teaching experience and its subjective dimension.

Unknown planets: records of knowledge

The everyday practice of teaching in Early Childhood Education reveals itself as a field of permanent discoveries, in which each activity, project, or interaction configures a territory not yet fully known. The teachers' statements show that pedagogical planning takes on the function of a provisional map, constantly revised in light of lived experiences.

“Each activity is a new planet. We never know how they're going to react, but every experience is recorded in memory as a coordinate for future journeys.” (Teacher J)

“Sometimes I plan one thing, and halfway through, I realize the children are taking me somewhere else. We need to learn to change course without losing the meaning of the journey.” (Teacher M)

“Some projects start small and keep growing as the children get involved. Before I know it, we're already exploring a universe I hadn't even imagined at the start.” (Teacher A)

This understanding is in dialogue with Freyesleben (2019), who states that educational time is constituted by multiple temporalities, marked by the duration and intensity of events, and not only by chronological succession. Pedagogical records such as plans, projects, photographs, drawings, and notes operate, in this context, as devices of memory and reflection, allowing the teacher to transform lived experience into pedagogical knowledge.

From a methodological point of view, this movement of reading the records approaches the case study approach, insofar as it considers the singularity of educational situations and the complexity of the contexts investigated. The knowledge that emerges from these “unknown planets” is not universal or generalizable, but situated, produced in the relationship between teacher, children, and institutional context.

In this context, openness to the unpredictable, although it constitutes a pedagogical potency, also bears on the subjective dimension of teaching work, requiring teachers to constantly exercise adaptation, contextual reading, and internal reorganization. This condition shows that everyday life in Early Childhood Education involves not only didactic decisions, but also processes of emotional self-regulation and self-care, aspects directly related to mental health in educational work.

Wormholes: affective records

Affects run through teaching as connections that shorten temporal distances, linking past experiences to effects that extend over time (Neves, 2017). The metaphor of wormholes makes it possible to understand how apparently simple gestures produce

lasting marks on the constitution of children and on teachers' memory, operating as passages that connect the present of pedagogical action to unpredictable futures.

"A hug or an attentive look crosses time, like a tunnel between present and future, being remembered years later." (Teacher K)

"Sometimes we don't notice it at the time, but that care stays. Years later the child comes back and remembers the way they were welcomed." (Teacher M)

"There are children we accompany for only a short time, but the bond that's created seems to stay stored away. Sometimes I think that what we do there keeps happening inside them." (Teacher D)

Even though such situations may be recognized as part of everyday educational life, their recurrence in the narratives evidences specific modes of signifying teaching experience. These narrative fragments, identified in the unitarization process of the discursive textual analysis, reveal discursive recurrences associated with care, bonding, and affective memory, constituting nuclei of meaning that cross different teachers' accounts (Moraes; Galiazzi, 2006; Moraes, 2016). When grouped together in the categorization movement, these records configure affects as relevant operators of educational experience in Early Childhood Education.

Narrative fragments like these appeared recurrently in the interviews conducted, indicating the relevance of affects in teaching experience, without this experience being exhausted by that dimension. In this sense, the narratives show that teaching is sustained not only by technical or cognitive dimensions, but by affective and desiring investments; as Maman (2025) points out, gestures of care, words of encouragement, and collective rituals operate as devices for the production of bonding, sustaining processes of learning, belonging, and mutual recognition.

This understanding can be deepened in light of Agamben (2017), who conceives childhood not as a stage to be overcome, but as a "future anterior" of the human, that is, as a temporal dimension that tensions the linearity of development. For the author, childhood carries a potency of regression, understood not as a return to the past, but as an opening to another time, in which past and future intertwine. This perspective is akin to the metaphor of wormholes, in that it suggests the existence of passages connecting different temporalities, making it possible to understand educational experience as a field in which time is not organized progressively, but as the coexistence of multiple temporal layers.

Rolnik (1995) contributes to this reading by understanding subjectivity as a relational production, crossed by ethical, aesthetic, and political dimensions. From this perspective, the wormholes of teaching are constituted in the relations that mobilize affects and meanings, establishing singular ways of existing and learning in the school space, whose effects extend beyond the immediate time of pedagogical practice.

In dialogue with Foucault (2004), these affective records can be understood as everyday practices of self-care, in which the relation with the other (children, colleagues, the school community) becomes a condition for the ethical sustainment of teaching. Care, in this sense, is not configured as an individual or therapeutic gesture, but as a situated practice that runs through the work and operates as a possibility for the protection and production of mental health in everyday school life.

Relative time: improvisations and mistakes

The relativity of time manifests itself clearly in improvisations and in so-called pedagogical “mistakes”, which frequently turn into highly intense formative events (Ferreira; Cajueiro, 2023). In these situations, the initial planning gives way to the encounter with the unforeseen, establishing other durations and meanings for educational experience.

“Sometimes an activity that seemed small turns into a huge learning experience, as if time had passed in a strange way.” (Teacher L)

“There was a day when nothing went as planned, but it was exactly there that the children learned the most. It's as if time opened up in a different way.” (Teacher N)

“When something goes wrong, I try to observe what the children do with it. Often the mistake turns into play, conversation, discovery.” (Teacher F)

“It's happened that I got frustrated because I couldn't get through what I had planned, but afterward I realized that improvised moment made a much bigger impression on the group.” (Teacher B)

These narratives reveal that educational time is neither linear, predictable, nor fully controllable. According to Freyesleben (2019), certain experiences condense multiple temporalities, producing effects that extend beyond the instant in which they occur. Improvisation, in this sense, is not configured as a deviation from pedagogical practice, but as an expression of teaching that is sensitive to events and to the forces that emerge in everyday school life.

The narratives reveal that such experiences mobilize ambiguous affects such as frustration, insecurity, and tiredness, but also relief, invention, and meaning, composing a complex field in which teachers' mental health is not defined by the absence of suffering, but by the possibility of elaborating lived experience, transforming mistakes into learning, and sustaining oneself over the time of the work. When articulated in the categorization process, these accounts evidence a broadened understanding of pedagogical time, in which learning implies experimenting, making mistakes, redoing, and creating, in keeping with a living, processual conception of teaching in Early Childhood Education.

In this sense, teachers' mental health is understood not as an individual state or the absence of suffering, but as a relational process, produced within the fabric of everyday school life, in affective bonds, and in the possibilities for listening, creation, and self-recognition at work. The interviews were thus configured as devices of self-care and of elaboration of lived experience, in which narrating, remembering, and reflecting on teaching experience operated as practices of meaning production, subjective sustainment, and the affirmation of life in educational work.

In light of these analyses, it becomes possible to affirm that the experiences narrated by the teachers show how teaching in Early Childhood Education constitutes a field of meaning production in which affects, temporalities, and practices of care are articulated inseparably with mental health. The narratives reveal that living educational time marked by improvisations, bonds, mistakes, and creations not only organizes pedagogical work, but also subjectively sustains teachers, making possible the elaboration of wear, the invention of ways of remaining in the profession, and the affirmation of life in everyday school life. In this way, the analysis of the interviews makes it possible to understand that teachers' mental health emerges as a relational and situated process, produced in the crossings of educational space-time, responding to the study's guiding question and evidencing the achievement of the proposed objective.

Maps of teaching: records and connections in the educational space-time

The different types of records produced by the teachers can be understood as cartographic maps of teaching, in which knowledge, affects, and formative processes are inscribed. Inspired by the cartographic perspective (Passos; Barros, 2020; Scherer, 2022), this representation does not seek to fix trajectories, but to follow movements. The table below does not introduce new empirical data, but synthesizes, in cartographic form, the meanings and intensities that emerged from the teachers' narratives analyzed in the previous subsections.

Table 2 - Types of records and meanings preserved.

Type of Record	Examples in Teaching Practice	Meaning Preserved
Planets of knowledge	Projects, lesson plans, experiments	Knowledge built through experience and the affirmation of teacher authorship
Wormholes	Hugs, compliments, meaningful conversations	Affective bonds, memory, and relational sustainment of teaching work
Improvisations and mistakes	Adapted activities, unexpected responses	Creativity, openness to events, and elaboration of the unforeseen
Collective memories	Parties, games, celebrations	Belonging, collective identity, and the production of recognition
Teacher reflection	Diaries, accounts, self-assessments	Continuous professional development and self-care

Source: Elaborated by the author (2026).

The elaboration of this map dialogues symbolically with Sagan's (2008) perspective, in understanding human experience – and, here, teaching experience – as a form of exploration of the unknown. The maps of teaching do not close off the path, but orient new crossings, recognizing Early Childhood Education as a living field for the production of knowledge, affects, and meanings.

In this direction, the analysis of the interviews sought to follow the movements of meaning production that emerge from the teachers' narratives, in keeping with cartography as an intervention-research method (Passos; Barros, 2020; Tedesco; Sade; Caliman, 2014) and with discursive textual analysis, understood as an interpretive and constructive process (Moraes, 2016; Moraes; Galiazzi, 2006).

Teaching in Early Childhood Education involves desiring, affective, and ethical investments, configuring teaching as a living, situated practice (Maman, 2025). The metaphor of space-time, inspired by the film *Interstellar*, used not as a narrative illustration, but as an analytical operator, makes it possible to name and understand temporal, affective, and experiential dimensions of teaching that escape linear descriptions of everyday school life. For Maman (2025):

Narratives are living organisms, which foster both the accumulation of information and the exchange of ideas, allowing for the construction of new interpretations about the structure of meaning of thought in the face of the multiplicity of wants and doings in the everyday life of the school institution and in their lives. There is a movement in search of understanding the role of the singular self and the social self on the part of the teachers, as they engage in dialogue and develop an evolving understanding of the conditions that mobilize the desire for knowledge and the potency of the affects involved in the exercise of teaching, in a confluence of feelings from which meanings emerge (Maman, 2025, p.22-23)⁸

The metaphor acted as a device of thought by problematizing teaching from four interconnected conceptual axes: crossing, the relativity of time, the production of legacies, and the affects that cross the present and reverberate into the future (Alcoforado, 2021), insofar as the teachers' narratives connect to one another through recurrences of meaning, composing a fabric that is constituted in the very shared experience of teaching. In this movement, remembrance is not restricted to the individual evocation of lived experience, but operates as an interpretive process that articulates past events with the present of the analysis, allowing teachers to recognize themselves in stories that intertwine and produce a continuity of meanings over time.

⁸ Original: “As narrativas são organismos vivos, que fomentam tanto a acumulação de informações quanto a troca de ideias, permitindo a construção de novas interpretações sobre a estrutura de significação do pensamento diante da multiplicidade de querer e fazer no cotidiano da instituição escolar e em suas vidas. Há um movimento de busca pela compreensão do papel do eu singular e do eu social por parte das professoras, à medida que dialogam e desenvolvem uma compreensão evolutiva sobre as condições que mobilizam o desejo pelo conhecimento e a potência dos afetos envolvidos no exercício da docência numa confluência de sentires da qual emergem significados” (Maman, 2025, p.22-23).

By articulating these experiences through the metaphor of space-time, it becomes possible to understand teaching in Early Childhood Education as a practice that involves not only the production of pedagogical knowledge, but also the management of affects, the confronting of wear, and the everyday invention of ways of remaining at work. From this perspective, mental health emerges as an ethical-political process, woven into the relations, times, and meanings produced in teaching experience. Just as, in the cinematic narrative, time is neither homogeneous nor linear, in teaching in Early Childhood Education it presents itself as lived duration, marked by intensities, improvisations, and events that escape chronological measurement.

Table 3 - Interstellar as an analytical operator: relations between the cinematic metaphor, teaching, and mental health.

Metaphorical Axis (Interestelar)	Conceptual Operation	Expressions in Early Childhood Education Teaching	Analytical Meanings Produced
Crossing	Teaching as an open, nonlinear path	Planning, pedagogical shifts, adaptation to children's experiences	Teaching as a process in becoming, marked by ethical and formative choices, and implications for self-care
Relativity of time	Educational time as lived duration	Improvisations, mistakes, intensive experiences that condense learning	Tensioning of chronological and productivist logic, with effects on suffering and mental health
Wormholes	Affective connections that cross time	Gestures of care, bonds, affective memories evoked later on	Affectivity as an operator of learning, subjective constitution, and the sustainment of mental health
Production of legacies	Lasting effects of teaching practice	Symbolic marks left on children and on professional identity	Teaching as a practice of producing symbolic recognition
Exploration of the unknown	Openness to the unpredictable	Listening to children, creation stemming from events	Teaching as an inventive, ethical, and political practice, implicated in the production of ways of living and working

Source: Elaborated by the author (2026).

Teachers' everyday gestures (plans, mistakes, bonds, forms of care) operate as crossings that produce effects beyond the instant in which they occur, constituting affective and pedagogical legacies inscribed in children's memory and in teachers' own subjectivity. By taking Interstellar as a force-image, in the Deleuzian sense (Deleuze, 2011), the reading of teaching is seen as a complex space-time experience, in which teaching and caring imply ethical, affective, and formative shifts, aligned with a living, processual, and relational conception of educational work. In this sense, the maps of teaching can be understood as devices of care, insofar as they allow teachers to recognize, elaborate, and share the experiences that sustain their permanence at work and the production of mental health in the everyday life of Early Childhood Education.

Return coordinate: crossings that remain in the space-time of teaching

Thinking of teaching in Early Childhood Education as a crossing through educational space-time made it possible to shift the way we look at everyday school life, recognizing it as a legitimate field for the production of knowledge, affects, and meanings, with direct implications for teachers' mental health. The teachers' narratives show that teaching young children involves the constant exploration of the unknown, openness to events, and the construction of bonds that cross time, bearing on ways of feeling, existing, and remaining in teaching.

Cartography made it possible to map these crossings by following the movements of teaching as inseparable from feeling. As an intervention-research method, cartography did not seek to represent teaching in a static or normative way, but to follow its lines of force, intensities, and variations, revealing how pedagogical work is constituted in the weaving together of planning, improvisation, affect, and reflection. In this movement, the crossings in the space-time of teaching emerge as living, singular, and situated processes, which produce meanings both for those who teach and for those who learn, while at the same time operating as devices that sustain, or wear down, teachers' mental health.

The interstellar metaphor proved to be a powerful analytical operator in making it possible to understand teaching time as relative, marked by singular intensities and durations. Small gestures, everyday encounters, and pedagogical choices proved capable of producing effects that extend beyond the lived instant, inscribing themselves in teachers' memory and in children's formative trajectory. From the standpoint of mental health, these often-invisible accumulated effects configure affective legacies that can both strengthen the meaning of the work and amplify experiences of overload, requiring attention to the institutional conditions under which such practices take place. Pedagogical records, in this context, are configured as provisional maps of these crossings, not to fix paths, but to sustain reflective processes, elaborate lived experiences, and open new possibilities for action and self-care.

By articulating cartography, discursive textual analysis, and poetic-reflective writing, this study reaffirms Early Childhood Education as a fertile space for research, creation, and pedagogical thought, in dialogue with the field of collective health and mental health. Teaching emerges as an ethical, aesthetic, and political practice, committed to care, to sensitive listening, and to producing the conditions for significant experiences to happen within the school. This is a form of teaching recognized as human, living, relational work, crossed by affects, choices, responsibilities, and subjective implications. From a methodological standpoint, the research contributes by showing that qualitative approaches sensitive to the intensities of lived experience make it possible to access dimensions of teaching that are frequently rendered invisible by normative, productivist, or technicist analyses.

Recognizing teaching as an interstellar journey is to affirm that every teacher leaves behind legacies that are invisible yet lasting: affective, symbolic, and relational marks that cross time and continue orbiting in children's lives, long after the ship has moved on to other crossings. These legacies, woven in everyday life, reaffirm the potency of Early Childhood Education as a foundational experience in the constitution of subjects and, simultaneously, as a space that demands ethical and political attention to teachers' working conditions and mental health.

In this sense, understanding teaching in Early Childhood Education from the affective and subjective crossings that constitute it also implies tensioning the ways in which initial and continuing teacher training policies have recognized, or silenced, these dimensions of teaching work. Valuing such experiences requires building institutional conditions of listening, time, and care, capable of sustaining pedagogical practices that are not reduced to prescription, but that recognize teaching as a formative experience in itself, inseparable from the production of mental health in everyday school life.

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