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Como nos tornamos professores: Permanências e metamorfoses da profissão docente

How we become teachers: Continuities and metamorphoses in the teaching profession

Cómo nos convertimos en docentes: Permanencias y transformaciones de la profesión docente

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RESUMO

Este texto, *Como nos tornamos professores*, analisa as permanências e metamorfoses da profissão docente num tempo de profundas transformações na educação e na escola. Iniciando com a imagem dos professores como alvos ou como centros, desenvolve-se em dez fragmentos que abordam os seguintes temas: 1) a formação inicial; 2) a fase de transição entre a formação e a profissão; 3) a assinatura pedagógica dos professores; 4) a colaboração docente; 5) o conhecimento profissional dos professores; 6) a *auctoritas* dos professores; 7) o ensino como criação; 8) a humanidade dos professores; 9) a coragem da liberdade; 10) as metamorfoses da profissão docente. O epílogo insiste na responsabilidade dos professores pela sua própria profissão[1].

Palavras-chave: Colaboração. Conhecimento profissional docente. Formação de professores.

ABSTRACT

This text, *How we become teachers*, analyzes the continuities and metamorphoses of the teaching profession in a time of profound transformations in education and schools. Beginning with the image of teachers as targets or as centers, it unfolds in ten fragments addressing the following themes: 1) initial teacher education; 2) the

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transition phase between teacher education and the profession; 3) teachers' pedagogical signature; 4) teacher collaboration; 5) teachers' professional knowledge; 6) teachers' *auctoritas*; 7) teaching as creation; 8) teachers' humanity; 9) the courage of freedom; 10) the metamorphoses of the teaching profession. The epilogue emphasizes teachers' responsibility for their own profession.

Keywords: Collaboration. Professional teaching knowledge. Teacher education.

RESUMEN

Este texto, *Cómo nos convertimos en docentes*, analiza las permanencias y metamorfosis de la profesión docente en un tiempo de profundas transformaciones en la educación y en la escuela. Partiendo de la imagen de los docentes como blancos o como centros, se desarrolla en diez fragmentos que abordan los siguientes temas: 1) la formación inicial; 2) la fase de transición entre la formación y la profesión; 3) la firma pedagógica de los docentes; 4) la colaboración docente; 5) el conocimiento profesional de los docentes; 6) la *auctoritas* de los docentes; 7) la enseñanza como creación; 8) la humanidad de los docentes; 9) el coraje de la libertad; 10) las metamorfosis de la profesión docente. El epílogo insiste en la responsabilidad de los docentes respecto de su propia profesión.

Palabras clave: Colaboración. Conocimiento profesional docente. Formación docente.

Introduction: targets or centers?

Throughout history, teachers[1] have rarely been targets of so much attention. International organizations, governments, universities, experts, commentators, families: all seem to have an explanation for their problems, a solution to their difficulties, a proposal for their future. Never have so many reports, diagnoses, or recommendations about teachers been produced. The teaching profession has become an object of permanent observation. Performances are measured, competencies are classified, practices are analyzed, futures are anticipated.

Perhaps this sudden interest can be explained by the growing shortage of teachers around the world, by the threat of technologies, or simply by the belated recognition of an irreplaceable profession. The multiplication of discourses, however, does not guarantee clarity of vision. In excess, light produces the same effect as darkness: it keeps us from seeing.

It is important, therefore, to make an elementary distinction. A target receives the gaze. Expectations, prescriptions, and judgments converge upon it. Its existence is defined from the outside. A center is different. It does not exist because it is observed, but because meanings, relationships, and possibilities radiate from it. It is not merely an object of vision: it is a condition for seeing differently.

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The decisive question is not what is thought about teachers, but recognizing their capacity to think about the profession, to produce a knowledge of their own, and to take part in defining their futures. Teachers have been treated as targets and not as centers. More is said about them than from them. One of the main difficulties of the profession is the existence of so many gazes from the outside and the absence of new ways of seeing, from the inside.

This text does not seek to add yet another description of the teaching profession, nor to repeat the usual narratives about its problems, its competencies, or its challenges. It returns to a simpler and, for that very reason, more necessary question: *how do we become teachers?*

The question seems modest, but it is not. Because no one becomes a teacher only once in a lifetime. We become teachers slowly: in the crossing between what we are and what we want to be, between the heritage of the profession and a singular way of inhabiting it, between continuities and metamorphoses. It is this crossing that the ten fragments that follow address[2].

How is a teacher taught to be a teacher?

There are law students who have never entered a courtroom or medical students who have never followed the life of a hospital. Future teachers find themselves in a very different situation. When they arrive at the university, they bring with them a long experience of school. They have spent thousands of hours in it. They know its rhythms, spaces, rules, and silences. They have lived for years alongside dozens of teachers. No other university education begins with such a deep familiarity with the universe of the profession.

But they know school from the student's point of view. Teacher education begins when they adopt a different perspective. Becoming a teacher requires a displacement of the gaze. Learning to see school in another way.

> I had two teachers who taught me a great deal about the profession I have chosen today. A Biology teacher brought objects, images, and small everyday phenomena into the classroom and first asked us what we thought was happening. A History teacher made us look at events from different points of view, as if we were inside them. That way of teaching stayed with me: provoking the gaze, asking questions, and turning knowledge into a discovery. (Undergraduate teaching degree student, Brazil) [2]

Long before the first Didactics or Methodology class, future teachers have already observed thousands of classes. Without knowing it, they learned gestures, rhythms, ways of entering a room, of beginning a class, of answering an unexpected

[2] **Original:** *"Tive dois professores que me ensinaram muito sobre a profissão que hoje escolhi. Um professor de Biologia levava para a sala objetos, imagens e pequenos fenómenos do quotidiano e perguntava-nos primeiro o que pensávamos que estava a acontecer. Uma professora de História fazia-nos olhar para os acontecimentos a partir de diferentes pontos de vista, como se estivéssemos dentro deles. Ficou comigo essa maneira de ensinar: provocar o olhar, fazer perguntas e transformar o conhecimento numa descoberta"* (*Estudante de licenciatura, Brasil*).

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question, of correcting an exercise, or of looking at a student. They gradually composed a first memory of the profession. In it there are teachers they wish to meet again and others they will never want to imitate, forgotten episodes and experiences that remain alive. There is a whole prior knowledge of the profession before we decide to become teachers.

This memory is only a starting point. Teacher education begins when experience is questioned, the horizon widens, and new possibilities for understanding and acting emerge. The passage from student to teacher is not merely a change of position; it is a transformation of the way of seeing, interpreting, and inhabiting the profession.

That is why teacher education cannot be reduced to the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical techniques. From the first day of the undergraduate teaching degree, it is essential to enter the profession, to be part of it, to know its cultures, to share its ways of thinking, to take part in its debates, and to confront its dilemmas. Professional identity is not added to personal identity like an outer layer. It is formed slowly, in the way one transforms the other.

In this domain, universities reveal a great fragility. They know how to organize courses, distribute content, and conduct research. But they have not been able to give the profession a central place in teacher education. Too often they remain distant from its ways of thinking, its forms of knowledge, and the richness of its experiences and cultures.

We therefore need new teacher education institutions. It is not enough to bring universities and schools closer together. It is necessary to build common spaces, “third spaces”, in which the profession has presence, voice, and responsibility. Teacher education needs content and pedagogies, but also a third kind of knowledge that only the profession produces. If we do not strengthen this third vertex, through the presence of teachers themselves, we will not be able to overcome the impasse in which teacher education finds itself.

Teacher education institutions must be “institutions of the profession”. Because it is through contact with the pedagogical event, with everyday work, and with shared reflection on experience that future teachers are formed. Authentic education comes from the deep roots of the profession and returns to it, renewing its gestures, its principles, and its capacity to create the future.

In-between: from teacher education to the profession

Teacher education ends quickly; the profession begins slowly. Between the two opens a time of uncertainty, responsibility, and learning. It is in this *in-between* that almost everything is decided. A young medical graduate is not yet a doctor. The graduate becomes a doctor in the first years of practice, in the daily encounter with patients, with more experienced colleagues, and with a reality that no course can anticipate. The same happens with teachers. No one becomes a teacher upon completing initial teacher education. We become teachers when we begin to exercise professional responsibility.

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> Today, looking back on the beginning of my career, I recognize that nothing was as challenging as those first times. Adapting to the school, earning the respect of students and colleagues, and learning to deal with everyday difficulties demanded a great deal of me. They were years of intense work, insecurities, and moments I do not forget. Now retired, those memories seem even more present. It was in those years that I found my path as a teacher. (Retired teacher, Portugal)[3]

Paradoxically, this decisive period remains one of the most neglected in the professional life of teachers. Teachers are launched into schools like someone thrown into the water, in the hope that necessity will teach them to swim. It is forgotten, however, that integration into a profession results neither from improvisation nor from chance: it demands support, recognition, and concrete conditions. Not having yet fully assumed the responsibility of welcoming those who enter it is the most serious fragility of the teaching profession.

Young graduates constitute a singular community. They inhabit a border where education has already ended but the profession is yet to be won. It is a time in which knowledge becomes experience, identity is built, and responsibility gains weight. No other moment of teaching life concentrates so many discoveries, hesitations, and possibilities of transformation.

No beginning teacher should face this crossing alone. It is a passage that requires institutions capable of linking university and school in a space of continuity where it is possible to learn, to experiment, and to establish oneself as a teacher. Nothing will be achieved without the participation of more experienced colleagues, capable of transmitting a professional inheritance and of reinventing it with those who are now arriving.

The *in-between* is a border. We are not yet fully teachers, but we are no longer merely students. In this period a lasting disposition toward teaching, students, colleagues, and the profession itself is born. From it may result a confidence that will accompany the whole professional life or, on the contrary, a feeling of malaise and disenchantment that will hardly go away.

Among the many responsibilities of a profession, none is as decisive as the capacity to welcome those who enter it. In this gesture of transmission, care, and recognition, a profession ensures its continuity. It is in this *in-between* that a large part of the future of the teaching profession is decided.

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The teacher's signature

There are no two identical teachers, even when they teach the same subject, in

[3] **Original:** *"Hoje, ao recordar o início da minha carreira, reconheço que nada foi tão desafiante como aqueles primeiros tempos. Adaptar-me à escola, conquistar o respeito dos alunos e dos colegas, e aprender a lidar com as dificuldades do dia a dia exigiu muito de mim. Foram anos de trabalho intenso, de inseguranças e de momentos que não esqueço. Hoje, já aposentada, essas memórias parecem ainda mais presentes. Foi nestes anos que encontrei o meu caminho como professora."* (*Professora aposentada, Portugal*)

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the same school, and according to the same syllabus. Each lives the profession in their own way and leaves a singular mark, their fingerprint, recognizable, impossible to reproduce, and inseparable from the person. It is from this singularity that the richness of teaching is born.

Severo de Melo, who practiced the teaching profession at a school in Coimbra, said that teachers needed to "personalize themselves". It is worth exploring this idea. It is not a matter of closing in on oneself or seeking an artificial originality, but of becoming a person within the profession. Slowly discovering one's own way of teaching, thinking, deciding, and being with students. Finding one's signature.

> Being a teacher was, for me, a continuous process of discovery. Instead of following recipes, I sought to build an identity of my own, learning from each class and adapting to the people I met. Today, I realize that my greatest achievement was not having found a perfect method, but a way of teaching that reflected my values and my way of being in education. (Basic education teacher[4], Portugal)[5]

The signature is never born from a solitary invention. No teacher starts from nothing. All receive an inheritance made of knowledge, gestures, words, ways of thinking and acting transmitted over generations. A teacher's originality does not lie in breaking with this inheritance, but in the way it is continued and recreated. Two teachers may teach the same content, use similar strategies, and share the same principles. Even so, they will always be different.

Students recognize this difference, even when they cannot explain it. They keep in memory a particular way of entering the room, a silence before answering, a gesture of trust, a look that welcomes or challenges. They are discreet signs, almost imperceptible. It is often in them that pedagogical authority resides. In music, Vladimir Jankélévitch called it the "I-know-not-what": that "almost-nothing" that escapes definitions and, precisely for that reason, makes all the difference. Every teacher also possesses this "I-know-not-what" so hard to describe. It is not a mysterious gift or an innate talent. It is formed slowly, in the encounter between the person, experience, and the profession.

A leading profession does not seek to have identical teachers. It needs professionals capable of thinking critically about their practice, of doubting their certainties, of learning from others, and of remaining intellectually restless. The

[4] **Translator's note:** The Portuguese and Brazilian education systems use different names for comparable levels. In Portugal, *ensino básico* (basic education) comprises nine years of schooling, from grade 1 to grade 9, and *ensino secundário* (upper secondary education) comprises grades 10 to 12. In Brazil, *ensino fundamental* (elementary education) comprises nine years of schooling, and *ensino médio* (upper secondary education) comprises the three years that follow. In Brazil, *educação básica* (basic education) is the umbrella term for early childhood education, *ensino fundamental*, and *ensino médio*.

[5] **Original:** *"Ser professora foi, para mim, um processo contínuo de descoberta. Em vez de seguir receitas, procurei construir uma identidade própria, aprendendo com cada turma e adaptando-me às pessoas que encontrava. Hoje, percebo que a minha maior conquista não foi ter encontrado um método perfeito, mas uma forma de ensinar que refletia os meus valores e a minha maneira de estar na educação."* (*Professora do ensino básico, Portugal*)

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diversity of schools, students, and situations demands a plurality of presences and of ways of inhabiting the profession.

Professional freedom is not a privilege; it is a condition of teaching itself. Without room to experiment, make mistakes, reflect, and begin again, no signature can take shape. A profession exists because it transmits a common inheritance, remaining relevant thanks to the singular way in which it is interpreted. Like a fingerprint, each teacher's mark is unique. Like a signature, it attests to belonging: it says who we are and inscribes us in the profession that we help, every day, to build.

Being in-common in the profession[6]

A teacher can teach alone, but no one practices the profession alone. For a long time, teaching was closed within the classroom. Today we know that nothing is built in isolation, but in the capacity to work *in-common*. The profession exists beyond the classroom.

> I learned that collaboration among colleagues changes the way we work. When we plan together, observe one another's practices, and reflect collectively, we find solutions that would hardly emerge in isolation. It is in the exchange of experiences and in mutual trust that we manage to create more meaningful ways of teaching and learning. (Upper secondary education teacher, Brazil)[7]

Collaboration is defined on the basis of a reorganization of pedagogical work, and not merely as a gesture of goodwill. It only becomes meaningful if we change spaces and times, the curriculum and the subjects, moving from the "unitary" structure of each teacher's work with their class to "plural" work in a pedagogical team.

This work is harder than we usually imagine. It requires exposing unfinished projects, accepting the critical gaze of colleagues, revising convictions, and trying uncertain paths. This is how a profession learns. Change is born from experimentation, doubt, joint observation, and the desire to understand better what we do. Teachers do not develop in isolation or in fear, but in the "strength of mutuality". The *in-common* does not dissolve differences; it makes them fruitful.

It is in this space of trust that a profession truly begins to think about itself. The old opposition between theory and practice disappears when teachers collectively question lived experience. Reflection ceases to be a commentary external to the work and becomes an integral part of the work itself. Each pedagogical experience

[6] **Translator's note:** The author uses the hyphenated expression *em-comum* (literally, "in-common"), both adverbially (*trabalhar em-comum*, "to work in-common") and as a noun (*o em-comum*, "the in-common"), to name a shared way of being and working in the profession. It is kept here in its literal form.

[7] **Original:** *"Aprendi que a colaboração entre colegas muda a forma como trabalhamos. Quando planeamos juntos, observamos as práticas uns dos outros e refletimos coletivamente, encontramos soluções que dificilmente surgiriam de maneira isolada. É na troca de experiências e na confiança mútua que conseguimos criar formas mais significativas de ensinar e aprender."* (*Professora do ensino médio, Brasil*)

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becomes, at once, an act of teaching and a gesture of inquiry.

Composing a pedagogy is sometimes like the work of a theater company. Nothing is done alone. There are rehearsals, conversations, readings, disagreements, silences, encounters. A profession, too, is composed in this way: through the slow construction of a shared existence. Perhaps this is the deepest meaning of collegiality. We discover ourselves in conversation and in work with others. A profession is always greater than the sum of individual experiences.

A signature exists only because there is a common language. Likewise, a teacher fully finds their singularity only when they come to belong to a community of thought and work. It is in this shared space that collaboration ceases to be merely a principle or a conviction and becomes a way of being in the profession. The *in-common* does not diminish each person's signature. It is what gives it meaning and permanence.

Teachers' own knowledge

Teachers mobilize very diverse forms of knowledge. The maturity of the profession depends, however, on the capacity to produce a knowledge of its own. It is this knowledge that gives it consistency, autonomy, and a future. Just as medicine does not live only on the biomedical sciences, but on clinical knowledge built in relationship with patients, or law is not reduced to statutes, but develops through jurisprudence, teaching too needs to affirm a knowledge that is born from the profession itself.

Teacher education is usually organized around a vast architecture of knowledge: disciplinary content, pedagogies, didactics, psychologies, technologies, etc. This edifice is indispensable. It lacks, however, the most important foundation: the professional knowledge produced by teachers themselves. As long as this knowledge remains ignored, the profession will continue to be defined above all by knowledge developed by others.

> It was experience that taught me that the teacher's knowledge has a singular nature. It is not found only in books, nor is it limited to educational theories. It is born from the dialogue between scientific knowledge, daily practice, sensitivity in understanding each student, and constant reflection on what we do. This knowledge is one of the greatest riches of our profession. (Upper secondary education teacher, Portugal)[8]

Professional teaching knowledge has three essential characteristics.

It is *contingent* because it is not previously available, waiting to be applied, nor does it emerge automatically from experience. It forms in the encounter between what the teacher knows and what the situation demands. An unexpected question, a

[8] **Original:** *"Foi a experiência que me ensinou que o conhecimento do professor tem uma natureza singular. Não se encontra apenas nos livros nem se resume às teorias da educação. Nasce do diálogo entre o conhecimento científico, a prática quotidiana, a sensibilidade para compreender cada aluno e a reflexão constante sobre o que fazemos. Esse saber é uma das maiores riquezas da nossa profissão."* (*Professor do ensino secundário, Portugal*)

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prolonged silence, or an unforeseen reaction can change, in a few moments, the understanding of an educational situation. The teacher works in this threshold between what was prepared and what happens, between the intention to teach and the students' response. The profession is defined in the discernment of action.

It is *collective* because individual experience does not speak for itself. It needs to be questioned, confronted, and shared. Lived experiences become knowledge when they enter the conversation of the profession, when they are discussed, written, investigated, and put to the test by other teachers. No discovery belongs entirely to the one who made it. It is born in a singular situation, but only acquires full meaning when it becomes part of a common heritage. This is how a profession builds its intellectual memory and continually renews its capacity to understand and to act.

It is *public* because a profession is only fully realized when its knowledge becomes part of a broader debate. A profession is not an "internal" reality, one that is realized solely within its own workspace; it is necessarily a public reality. The recognition of teachers depends on their capacity to present their own knowledge publicly. Only then will they be able to take part in school and in the public sphere from an existence of their own.

Always targets, rarely centers, also in the realm of knowledge. The meaning of a profession is measured by its capacity to recognize, produce, and share its own knowledge. It is in this continuous creation that it finds its autonomy and strengthens its future.

Teachers' *auctoritas*

We are witnessing, today, the deepest crisis of the teaching profession since its consolidation in the nineteenth century. Multiple trends converge that place teachers under intense pressure, generating anguish and, not infrequently, suffering. A persistent malaise has set in, accompanied by a structural fatigue that erodes the social image of the profession, weakens teachers' motivation, and restricts their freedom.

Material issues – namely salary levels, the fragility of the career, and working conditions in schools – are decisive for understanding this reality. To these are added phenomena such as violence in the school context, the growing weight of bureaucracy, and the insufficient preparation of institutions to respond to an increasingly greater diversity of students.

> When I began teaching in upper secondary education, I discovered that one of my greatest difficulties was making myself recognized as a teacher. With students, I am still trying to find the balance between closeness and respect; with colleagues and parents, I often feel that my limited experience weighs heavily. I do not want to build authority through fear or distance. I want it to result from who I am, from what I do, and from the trust I gradually earn. I now realize that becoming a teacher is also learning to occupy this place. (Novice

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upper secondary education teacher, Brazil)[9]

Although the history of the profession has always known moments of difficulty, the present situation is distinguished by its particular gravity and extent. It is therefore important to ask what makes the current crisis singular. Beyond the material dimensions, whose relevance is unequivocal, there is a problem of a deeper nature: the teaching profession is losing vitality, and its space of affirmation is being reduced. Put differently, its *auctoritas* is in decline.

I refer to *auctoritas* in a triple sense: i) authority, not as coercion or imposition, but as social recognition, influence, and prestige; ii) authorship, that is, the capacity to conceive, structure, and give meaning to one's own work; and iii) authorization, understood as the right and legitimacy to intervene publicly. These three meanings have at their root the concept of "author" and stem from the Latin verb *augere*, which refers to the idea of increasing, making grow, expanding. The central question is whether we are still in a position to expand the vital space of the teaching profession or whether, on the contrary, we will witness its progressive contraction, with the consequent loss of autonomy and of the capacity for pedagogical, professional, and public affirmation.

Strengthening teachers' *auctoritas* – as authority, authorship, and authorization – is an indispensable condition for restoring vitality to the teaching profession and securing its future. The dignity of teachers also depends on it. This is a particularly important issue at a time when the profession faces difficulties in generational renewal. Young people will be attracted to teaching not only by the material conditions of professional practice, but also by the possibility of joining a profession that is intellectually demanding, socially recognized, and capable of offering spaces for creativity, collaboration, and responsibility.

Teaching as creation

Some imagine the teacher as someone who masters a body of knowledge and transmits it to their students. The image is reassuring, but insufficient. Teaching is not merely explaining clearly what is already known. It is remaining close to the questions that keep knowledge from becoming inert.

Jules Michelet wrote a surprising sentence: "I have always tried to teach only what I did not yet know". At first sight, it seems a paradox. It is not. No teacher teaches what they do not know. But they also cease to be able to teach when they merely repeat what they already master. Between ignorance and repetition there is a third place: that of the search. It is in this space that teaching becomes creation.

[9] **Original:** *"Quando comecei a dar aulas no ensino médio, descobri que uma das minhas maiores dificuldades era fazer-me reconhecer como professor. Com os alunos, ainda procuro encontrar o equilíbrio entre proximidade e respeito; com os colegas e os pais, muitas vezes sinto que a minha pouca experiência pesa. Não quero construir autoridade pelo medo ou pela distância. Quero que ela resulte daquilo que sou, daquilo que faço e da confiança que vou conquistando. Percebo agora que tornar-me professor é também aprender a ocupar esse lugar."* (*Professor iniciante do ensino médio, Brasil*)

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Roland Barthes confessed that his courses accompanied his own research. Gilles Deleuze said that he never prepared a class to present a completed body of knowledge, but to think before the students about a problem that remained open. Neither of them improvised. They prepared their classes at length so that the creative work of thought could take place in them.

> I never believed that school was merely a place to repeat what we already know. What inspires me most is when teachers and students allow themselves to create together, to experiment, to make mistakes, to start over, and to discover new paths. Those are the moments that give meaning to my work and remind me that educating is also an act of creation. (Upper secondary education teacher, Brazil)[10]

Creation begins with wonder. There is a moment when the world ceases to seem self-evident and a question interrupts the tranquility of familiar answers. Wonder, however, demands study. To study is to remain with a question for as long as it takes for it to reveal all its complexity. To read, to investigate, to compare, to experiment: not to accumulate information, but to learn to formulate new questions.

To create does not mean to invent out of nothing, nor to seek a circumstantial originality. It means bringing forth a possibility that remained latent in what already existed. Every class carries an inheritance – a language, a science, a work, a memory. The teacher's task consists in restoring it to life, allowing each generation to encounter it as if for the first time.

Michel Serres uses the image of the artichoke. School teaches us to separate, analyze, and decompose. What is harder is to recompose. Analysis is indispensable; composition is too. To create consists, often, in this patient gesture of joining again what analysis has separated.

Teachers do not create in place of students, but they gather the conditions for something to begin. They do not offer only answers; they make questions inevitable. They do not lead students to the end of a path; they help them discover paths that do not yet exist. This attitude expresses the deepest fidelity to knowledge: continuing to study it, to question it, and to teach it while remaining available to learn. The best teachers do not hide that they remain intellectually unfinished. They teach while creating. They create while teaching.

Each teacher is a humanity

Does education make us more human? The question no longer admits naive answers. George Steiner repeated it throughout his life, recalling one of the greatest wounds of European culture: "We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz

[10] **Original:** *"Nunca acreditei que a escola fosse apenas um lugar para repetir o que já sabemos. O que mais me inspira é quando professores e estudantes se permitem criar juntos, experimentar, errar, recomeçar e descobrir novos caminhos. São esses momentos que dão sentido ao meu trabalho e me lembram que educar é, também, um ato de criação."* (*Professora do ensino médio, Brasil*)

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in the morning". Neither culture nor art prevented barbarism. The first responsibility of teachers is to prevent knowledge from detaching itself from human conscience.

This responsibility becomes more demanding at a time when humanity is no longer thought of only in the relationship among people, but also in the relationship with the Earth and with all forms of life. To educate is to introduce new generations into a common world, teaching them simultaneously respect for the other and care for the planet.

Today, almost all debates about education converge on artificial intelligence. Some announce schools without teachers, without classes, and without schedules. Others imagine a "co-teaching" between teachers and AI systems, reserving for teachers what machines would not be able to do: empathy, listening, inspiration, or the quality of the relationship with students.

The distinction seems sensible, but it rests on a separation that impoverishes the profession. As if knowledge could be handed over to machines and the relationship remained the last refuge of teachers. Pedagogy has never lived off this division. Teaching work consists precisely in making knowledge a relationship and the relationship a form of knowledge.

> Technologies have changed the way I work, but they have not changed the meaning of my profession. I continue to believe that educating is accompanying people, interpreting contexts, and creating opportunities for each student to move forward. Digital tools, including artificial intelligence, are valuable when they strengthen this work. Never when they claim to take its place. (Basic education teacher, Portugal)[11]

Each teacher carries a humanity. Not only because they have a life history, but because they bring with them a singular way of understanding knowledge, of looking at the world, and of relating to others. It is this humanity that gives depth to content and makes school a unique place of encounter with those who are different from us.

Ricardo Reis wrote one of the most beautiful verses in the Portuguese language: "Put all that you are into the least thing you do". Perhaps teachers can listen to it as a discreet principle of professional life: put all the humanity you are into the least thing you do. Not in extraordinary gestures, but in attention, in rigor, in listening, in the fitting word, in trust offered at the right moment.

Education is rarely transformed by grand proclamations. It is made through an infinity of almost invisible gestures that introduce each generation to a heritage of knowledge, languages, memories, and ways of inhabiting the world. It is in these minimal gestures that one humanity meets another humanity. No technology will be able to replace what a teacher offers when teaching: the concrete presence of one human being before another human being.

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[11] **Original:** *"As tecnologias mudaram a forma como trabalho, mas não mudaram o sentido da minha profissão. Continuo a acreditar que educar é acompanhar pessoas, interpretar contextos e criar oportunidades para que cada aluno avance. As ferramentas digitais, incluindo a inteligência artificial, são valiosas quando fortalecem esse trabalho. Nunca quando pretendem ocupar o seu lugar."* (*Professora do ensino básico, Portugal*)

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There is no teaching without the courage of freedom

The courage of teachers rarely makes a noise. It does not reveal itself in heroic gestures or extraordinary deeds, but in the persistence of everyday work: starting again after a difficult class, revising a decision in light of experience, sustaining a problematic choice, staying beside a student when everything seems lost. There is a misunderstanding in turning teachers into superheroes. Those who attribute extraordinary powers to them almost always end up also imputing to them all the shortcomings of the school. The profession lives on a discreet, perseverant, and deeply human courage. This courage is nourished by the authentic hope that Ernst Bloch distinguished from fraudulent hope. Teachers know that education, by itself, does not transform the world, but they also know that the world will hardly change without education.

It is this paradox that sustains the profession. To educate is to act as if the impossible could happen, as if a student could always go further, as if a school could reinvent itself, as if a society could become more just. The impossible is not an escape from reality, but what prevents resignation and makes action viable. Teachers feel this tension daily between the world that exists and the world that seeks to be born.

Nothing is possible without freedom. No one educates for freedom while working under the permanent weight of fear, bureaucracy, or surveillance. Teaching implies judging, choosing, interpreting, creating, and assuming responsibilities. Every decision carries a risk, and no norm replaces a teacher's discernment before the singularity of a concrete situation.

> Throughout my career, I learned that a teacher's courage almost never makes noise. It lies in starting over after a class that did not go well, in changing one's mind when necessary, in sustaining a difficult decision, or in believing in a student when almost no one does. They are small gestures, but our profession is made of them. (Elementary education teacher, Brazil)[12]

João Guimarães Rosa wrote that "the ford of the world is courage". Perhaps it is also the ford of education. It is crossed by those who accept uncertainty without abdicating responsibility, who understand that teaching never consists in applying closed answers, but in deciding before what remains open. Nothing can replace a teacher's judgment, so often exercised in urgency and in the unforeseen.

What distinguishes teachers is not what they possess, but what they do. "Freedom is like this, movement": it exists in this incessant process of acting, deciding, and beginning again. Vladimir Jankélévitch spoke of the "courage of beginnings". Perhaps it is the most fitting way of understanding the profession. Teachers become

[12] **Original:** *"Ao longo da carreira, aprendi que a coragem do professor quase nunca faz barulho. Ela está em começar de novo depois de uma aula que não correu bem, em mudar de ideia quando é preciso, em sustentar uma decisão difícil ou em acreditar num aluno quando quase ninguém acredita. São gestos pequenos, mas é deles que a nossa profissão é feita."* (*Professor do ensino fundamental, Brasil*)

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teachers each time they inaugurate, through a gesture, a word, or a question, a new possibility of learning. Education is not a point of arrival. It is always a journey.

Metamorphoses of the teaching profession

How does someone who never finishes becoming a teacher become a teacher? All the fragments of this text are traversed by this question. No profession remains alive without changing. But none subsists if it loses what gives it identity. Teaching lives in this tension: renewing itself without dissolving, remaining faithful without repeating itself.

To be a teacher is to enter a story that began long before us. Each generation receives a heritage of knowledge, a professional culture, gestures, words, and ways of acting that cross time. Nothing begins with us. And yet, nothing remains exactly the same after our passage. The profession extends itself because each teacher gives it a singular way of existing. The future is a story that renews itself.

> The greatest change in my professional life did not happen overnight. It happened slowly, almost without my noticing. I learned to revise convictions, to abandon some ideas and to build others. I discovered that growing as a teacher does not mean remaining faithful to what I thought at the beginning, but having the courage to transform myself without losing what brought me here. (Basic education teacher, Portugal)[13]

The metamorphoses of the profession rarely result from ruptures. They are made through discreet, almost imperceptible displacements. The way of preparing a class, of listening to a student, of exercising authority, or of working with colleagues changes. Little by little, one discovers that teaching does not consist only in making others learn, but in continuously learning from the very act of teaching. This is how each generation rediscovers the inheritance received and gives it a new meaning.

This movement is revealed with particular clarity when a teacher takes part in the education of other teachers. At that moment they understand that the profession never belongs to them alone. They receive it from those who came before and now have the responsibility of handing it on to the next generation. They no longer work only for their students, but also for those who, one day, will teach with them and after them. It is in this gesture that the profession becomes aware of its continuity.

The person and the teacher do not follow separate paths. Motherhood or fatherhood, the loss of loved ones, decisive encounters, civic commitments, or intellectual and artistic discoveries leave marks on the way of teaching. There are not two parallel realities, but a single existence that finds in the profession one of its deepest expressions.

Ovid wrote that everything is transformed and nothing perishes. The strength of

[13] **Original:** *"A maior mudança da minha vida profissional não aconteceu de um dia para o outro. Foi acontecendo lentamente, quase sem que eu percebesse. Aprendi a rever convicções, a abandonar algumas ideias e a construir outras. Descobri que crescer como professor não significa permanecer fiel ao que pensava no início, mas ter a coragem de me transformar sem perder aquilo que me trouxe até aqui."* (*Professora do ensino básico, Portugal*)

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this intuition lies in showing that identity is realized through change. A profession exists only as long as it is capable of renewing itself. Identity is not a fixed image, but the capacity to remain recognizable in the process of transformation.

Without metamorphosis there would be no life. Each teacher receives an inheritance and leaves an unrepeatable mark. A profession does not exist twice in the same way. To educate teachers is to prepare them to be different from us without breaking the history that unites us. We remain the same because we accept becoming others. Metamorphosis is not the opposite of identity: it is the deepest form of its continuity.

Epilogue: still teachers

These pages were born from a simple restlessness: to understand how we become teachers. They did not seek to describe the profession or to add yet another diagnosis of school or education. They sought to come closer to this slow work through which a person learns to teach, to think about the profession, and to assume responsibility for its future.

We live in a time of great uncertainty. Predictions about the fate of school multiply, technological promises follow one another, and discourses about the future accumulate. Some announce radical transformations; others anticipate the decline of teachers. In the midst of this noise, it becomes difficult to hear the voice of the profession itself.

This is the most important task of the coming years: not merely to discuss the future of teachers, but to recognize their capacity to build it. No profession is renewed from the outside. It is nourished by many contributions but finds its vitality in the capacity to question experience, to produce knowledge, to educate new generations, and to assume its public obligations.

It was this conviction that guided the writing of these fragments. A profession lives on memory, but also on creation. On a freedom that demands the strengthening of *auctoritas*. On a knowledge inseparable from humanity. Education is born from this delicate weave of continuities and metamorphoses, in which each generation receives an inheritance, transforms it, and continues it.

The courage that we most need today is not found in grand reforms nor in the promises of an entirely new school, curriculum, or method. It is manifested in the daily constancy of thousands of teachers, exercised in the freedom of experimentation, of searching, of dialogue, and of encounter. Even when the profession goes through times of uncertainty and anguish, it is important to believe, in those moments too, that they are “all memories of joy”.

No one will do for teachers the work that falls to them. If they stop thinking about the profession, others will think for them. If they abdicate renewing it, others will decide its fate. To place teachers at the center of the profession is to recognize an indispensable condition for school to remain a place of knowledge, culture, and

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humanity. As long as there are children to whom to introduce the world – and a world to renew with them – there will be teachers.

Michel Serres closes The Troubadour of Knowledge (*Le Tiers-Instruit*) with two sentences that I have always interpreted as a discreet tribute to teachers. I want to leave them in the feminine, to conclude:

> Re-born, she knows, she has compassion.
> Finally, she can teach.

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Notes

[1] For ease of reading, the original text in Portuguese follows the Portuguese grammatical convention of using the masculine as a generic form, dispensing with duplicated formulations (such as *professor/a* or *professores/as*). This choice is strictly editorial. The text was conceived from an inclusive perspective and one of respect for equality and equity between women and men, recognizing, in particular, the significant female presence in the teaching profession.

[2] Each fragment is illustrated with the testimony of students and teachers, from Brazil and Portugal, collected directly by me, during visits to schools and universities.