

FROM BABY CARE TO THE CARING FOR THE EDUCATOR

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ABSTRACT

This research results from the experience of observing educators and children in institutions of Child Education and their work with school psychology. Initially, our observations focused on the assistance provided to the children. Gradually, the focus shifted to the assistance provided to educators. For this research, we selected the experiences of two educators at institutions of Child Education in cities of Rio Grande do Sul. The educators were the focus of weekly observations by means of the IRDI Methodology. Data were collected by means of a field journal and interviews. Being present with educators in their workplace proved fundamental. The support provided by the observations of researchers-psychoanalysts on the everyday life of educators and children generated countless possibilities for intervention. We propose implied-reserved presence, the caring for experience and selfcare as possibilities for supporting caretakers-educators.

Keywords: care; educators; childhood education.

Del cuidado con el bebé al cuidado con el educador

RESUMEN

Este estudio fue construido a partir de la experiencia de acompañamiento de educadoras y bebés en instituciones de educación infantil y de la labor con psicología escolar. La mirada sobre el cuidado, inicialmente dirigido al bebé, fue apuntando para el cuidado dirigido a la educadora. Se escogió para este estudio las experiencias vivenciadas junto a dos educadoras de instituciones de educación infantil en dos ciudades del Rio Grande do Sul. Se acompañaron semanalmente las educadoras por intermedio de la Metodología IRDI. Se recolectaron los datos a partir de diario de campo y entrevistas. El “estar con” el educador de guardería infantil, en su escena de trabajo, se destacó como fundamental. El acompañamiento del investigador-psicoanalista presente también con su cuerpo, es decir, participando del cotidiano de las educadoras y bebés, se apuntó para innumerables posibilidades de intervenciones. Como posibilidades de cuidado con el cuidador-educador, proponemos el cuidado como presencia implicada-reservada, el cuidado de la experiencia y el cuidado de sí.

Palabras clave: cuidado; educadores; educación infantil.

Do cuidado com o bebê ao cuidado com o educador

RESUMO

Este trabalho foi construído a partir da experiência de acompanhamento de educadoras e bebês em instituições de educação infantil e do trabalho com psicologia escolar. O olhar sobre o cuidado, inicialmente dirigido ao bebê, foi apontando para o cuidado dirigido à educadora. Foram escolhidas para este trabalho as experiências vivenciadas junto a duas educadoras de instituições de educação infantil em duas cidades do Rio Grande do Sul. As educadoras foram acompanhadas semanalmente através da Metodologia IRDI. Os dados foram coletados a partir de diário de campo e entrevistas. O “estar com” o educador de berçário, em sua cena de trabalho, destacou-se como fundamental. O acompanhamento do pesquisador-psicanalista presente também com seu corpo, isto é, participando do cotidiano das educadoras e bebês, apontou para inúmeras possibilidades de intervenções. Como possibilidades de cuidado com o cuidador-educador, propomos o cuidado como presença implicada-reservada, o cuidado da experiência e o cuidado de si.

Palavras-chave: cuidado; educadores; bebês.

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INTRODUCTION

The experience¹ which resulted in the writing of this article happened in two stages. Initially, we gathered a team of researchers from the Nucleus for the Teaching, Research and Extension of Inter-disciplinary Clinical Practice for Childhood (Núcleo de Ensino, Pesquisa e Extensão em Clínica Interdisciplinar da Infância) at the Clinic for Psychological Assistance of the Psychology Institute of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (Instituto de Psicologia da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – UFRGS). The team's objective was to work on educators and children at a nursery. Thus, we have participated in the construction of a research/extension project on the IRDI Methodology in the prevention of psychological damage in children that stay in nurseries during their first year and a half of age. Child Education was chosen because it has been verified that more and more families look for these institutions for support in daily care for their children, especially when both parents have jobs. As a result, many studies have emphasized the importance of an environment for Child Education in which professionals know how to deal with the children's individualities, considering that these children spend more time at the nursery than at home with their families (Crespin, 2006; Mariotto, 2009; Pesaro & Kupfer, 2012; Bernardino, 2014; Kupfer, Bernardino & Mariotto, 2014). The reason why we pay special attention to childhood is the fact that it is a crucial time in the development of personality (Bernardino, 2004). It is a time for the generation and confirmation of notions and constant development. In this sense, the intention is to observe this delicate period of childhood acquisitions and propose intervention strategies.

Thus, our group intended to use the methodology of IRDI² (Portuguese abbreviation for Clinical Indicators of Risk for Child Development) in the context of Child Education as a possibility for intervention with young children and educators at nurseries. In the project, two classes of Nursery I were observed at five schools connected to the city education system and two municipal schools in the city of Porto Alegre. The objective was the early detection of possible obstacles to the general and psychological development of children and, most importantly, the reflection with educators over the vital importance of their work in the development of the children they were taking care of. We paid weekly visits, for approximately one year, to a nursery room at a school connected to the city hall and located in the outskirts of the city. At this school, we observed nine children and their two educators.

¹ Article resulting from the author's master thesis, which was guided by the second author.

² Previous projects had been realized in the cities of Curitiba and São Paulo.

In a second stage, we worked with the psychology department in public schools in a municipality near Porto Alegre. Inspired by the previous methodology, we introduced the IRDI methodology to one of the institutions of Child Education we were working with. At this institution, a class of eighteen children and their educators were observed for approximately a year by means of weekly visits.

During our observations at the nurseries, among the diverse dimensions present in the nursery-educator-child relations, we questioned ourselves about caretaking. We noticed that there was little reflection on this function in the places we have researched. Thus, we share the concerns of Figueiredo (2012) and Kupermann (2009), who emphasized the urgent need of reflections over ethics at caretaking. Figueiredo (2012) pointed to the fact that caretaking practices are becoming reduced nowadays, which leads people to take less care of each other. In this sense, the following reflection is included concerning one of the roles to be played by psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts: "It seems to us that recovering this capacity is a precious, urgent task for the caretaker, for psychoanalysts and for everyone else" (p. 151). Likewise, Kupermann (2009) attributed caretaking, as affectionate availability associated with the hospitality notion, to the field of psychoanalytical ethics. It was emphasized that psychoanalysis, beyond a mere technical, interpreting exercise, shows a growing necessity to get closer to the experience of caretaking as providing a sensible presence.

In the context of the schools with which we were engaged, we noticed a lack of spaces for listening to the troubles experienced by educators when taking care of small children. Also, there were few possibilities for the sharing of information among professionals. Thus, the experience of observing educators and children led us into thinking over the way we situate ourselves as researchers/professionals regarding the educator-child duo and also regarding the education professional. We consider the relation built between educator and child to be different from the one established between parents and children, which constitutes a relation of affiliation with desires and expectations that precede the child's birth. On the other hand, one of the functions of educators is to take care of children with whom they have no history in common. In addition, their job implies being in close contact with the child for a determined period (David, 1998). Consequently, educators – especially the ones working at nurseries – have to tackle complex functions, for which they get little training or support (Silva, Wiles, Ferrari, & Cardoso, 2015).

In the course of our research, we noticed that the observations, conversations and discussions turned out to be powerful tools with which the educators were able to ask questions about the proper way to handle the

children, about their professional practice and about the negative feelings they experience in their job. Also, some educators said that our observations and talks made them feel supported and that it was possible for them to change the way they saw certain realities. Then we started to reflect also on the possibilities of taking better care of these professionals in order to help them perform better at the nursery.

Concerning these issues, we found in the article "The Holding Practice", by Benavides and Boukobza (1997), a proposal for practice where mothers would get support to care for their children. Mothers would also be encouraged to recognize the importance of their function. In order to provide mothers the support they needed, "holding for holding" was created (p. 92). In other words, the proposal was to provide care for caretakers by means of collaboration in order to raise awareness in educators without invalidating their importance (Boukobza, 2002). We propose that the observation be understood as "being with" in a position of "third witness" as suggested by Benavides and Boukobza (1997) for the work of psychoanalysts for the educator-child duo. In this sense, it all consists of providing caretakers with someone to listen to them and help them put their feelings into words. That would lead to the mediation of experiences concerning the ambivalent relation with the child. Figueiredo (2012) also emphasized the importance of the mother, as a caretaker of the child, to let herself be taken care of by other people.

We understand, in this case, that schools for Child Education – when they intend to ensure children's overall development by complementing the actions of family and community and promoting the children's introduction into social spheres (Brasil, 1996) – can be spaces for the amplification of and reflection on caretaking while taking into consideration the individuality of children and of educators as well. Thus, while considering that children's development is an unfinished process, where caretaking is fundamental, it is possible to invest in educators also in order to provide them with the means to keep constant development. Therefore, educators in collaboration with parents have the capacity to develop the individuality of children by means of caretaking. Educators are important actors in this developmental process and it is fundamental to reflect on the possibilities for supporting their work. Another important factor is the availability to listen to them when they talk about the problems they face in their function.

METHOD

The experience of observing the children and their educators at the nurseries of the two schools where we worked with the IRDI methodology produced

questions concerning the particularities of support to be given to nursery educators. Being "present" with the educators in their workplace proved fundamental. The presence of researchers-psychoanalysts in the everyday life of educators and children created numberless possibilities for intervention. In our experience with the educators, several elements pointed at that direction: support during work time, the possibilities for conversation, listening to complaints, support for spontaneous responses, the appreciation of potential, the questioning of strict routines and positions, the sharing of knowledge and so on.

The educational dimension was also contemplated in the work with the educators. The observations intended to focus on the singular nature of every individual-educator and hinted at a few effects of formation. Our proposal is to think of formation in accordance with Almeida (2011), by referring to the formation of teachers by means of psychoanalysis. Unlike the formations observed nowadays, it does not focus on "didactic, instrumental, and rational aspects connected to professional knowhow" (p. 33). Educators can get fully engaged and make progress by transforming their educational practices and positioning themselves as individuals who make their own decisions. Thus, it was possible to perceive important movements in the discourse of educators and in the way they performed their functions with the children. There was an amplification of capabilities and some of the educators also mentioned that they felt really supported with the observations.

The excerpts chosen for analysis in this article were obtained by means of records on journals and interviews with the educators. The excerpts show some of the experiences with two of the four observed educators. Their fictitious names are: Margarida and Rosa.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our experience with the observation of educators at the nursery and the contribution of important authors lead us to propose some ingredients as part of the caretaking of educators: reserved-implied presence (Figueiredo, 2012), the awareness of experience (Rodulfo, 2012; Bondía, 2002) and reflections over self-care (Foucault, 2004; Guimarães, 2008).

Taking care of educators by means of reserved-implied presence

Most often, caretaking means, basically, being able to pay attention, to recognize the individuality of the object of their care, to provide testimony of all that and, if possible, to bring individuals their own image (Figueiredo, 2012, p. 18).

Figueiredo (2012) included caretaking as a task for

all professionals in health and education and added that it is actually a task for every human being living in society. In this sense, the author proposed the “reserved presence” and the “implied” presence as axes of the functions of the caretaker (mothers, health-education professionals, psychoanalysts, etc). Caretaking based on a reserved presence does not involve *doing*. Rather, it involves silent caretaking focused on paying attention and responding when due. On the other hand, in the implied presence, the caretaker “does things” and becomes committed and pro-active. According to the author, in any caretaking experience, whether analytical or not, it would be impossible and absolutely insufficient to remain in a state of pure reservation, neutrality, indifference, or silence. Likewise, it would be impossible to be pure implication, that is, an exaggeration of the caretaking function, even if it were caused by the “best intentions”, such as saving, rescuing, or curing. Therefore, the author suggested a dynamic balance between these axes and that such balance be built spontaneously, which makes it necessary that caretakers take it easy on the “doing”. Thus, the caretaker “lets the object of their care be”, while renouncing omnipotence. As a result, “not doing becomes a subtle and effective means to take care” (p. 141). It is important to emphasize here the word *presence* in both possibilities of caretaking. In this sense, the caretaker is present in both positions by actively doing things or observing reservedly.

The proposals of Figueiredo (2012) for thinking over the function of caretaking gave support for reflections over our own work with the educators we observed. When we encouraged caretakers to *let each child be*, we also tried to *let educators be* as much as possible. In other words, we respected and appreciated their knowledge and, in addition to our presences, we listened to their concerns. We also paid attention to the singular way with which each educator took care and educated the children in their room, and provided the educators with a feedback on what we considered to be potentialities.

These reflections really seemed to influence the special way in which educator Rosa, who was reserved and shy at first, started to approach the children. Our interventions intended to provoke a reflection by educators over the importance of building a connection with the children they were taking care of. It was like Rosa finally got the “permission” to be spontaneous in her procedures. In order to do so, we subtly proposed questions for her to think about. We pointed at gestures, looks and sounds. We introduced new elements the act of playing and talking with the children:

When she was changing M’s diapers, Rosa took the child’s temperature.

Rosa seemed different.

She was singing and looking into the child’s eyes.

The child seemed mesmerized at the educator.

I said: “Look at the way the child looks at you, Rosa!”.

She smiled shyly and said: “yeah”! (Diário de Campo - pesquisadora).

Sometimes we just stayed there with her and kept to ourselves. However, we were available for when she needed to talk about any problem such as children who were constantly crying, a written message from a mother, some absent co-worker, conflicts with the administration of the school, or even about interesting interactions with the children in-between our visits. During our time together, there were several occasions in which the educator said she felt truly supported and emphasized the importance of our presence and our conversations:

...There was support by the school as well, right?

It is so important...

I felt much safer and more confident with your help...

I felt privileged... I never felt like this in the other schools, you see?

Sometimes we feel lonely.

But this year I haven't felt lonely for a second.

It is great to have company.

I love it when there is someone to help and support. (Interview - Rosa).

According to Figueiredo (2012), one of the most important functions of the caretaker is to give support and help face difficulties by offering a feeling of continuity and continence and by contributing to the capacity to dream. It is important to keep an eye on the transformations of individuals and help them acquire form, color and language. Besides that, the caretaker is a source of questions and enigmas that will encourage the individual to speak.

In this sense, the monitoring of activities by educators at nurseries, as proposed by the IRDI methodology, can be thought of as a possibility to offer care and support to educators by means of listening to the concerns of these professionals who work with young children. It is a job with plenty of peculiarities and it implies a direct relation with the child’s body. To Maciel (2010), it is necessary to provide professionals in Child Education with the chance to elaborate on the psychological experiences resulting from the proximity with the children. Aragão (2009) also emphasized the

importance of monitoring the formation of professionals who take care of children and suggested the creation and support of spaces where psychoanalysts can listen to these professionals as they talk about what affects their contact with the little beings under construction. The following scene involves Educator Rosa and leads us to propose a reflection on the support provided to educators.

On the last day of class... Rosa started removing the decorations hanging from the ceiling.

In order to do so, she had to step onto a little stool.

The first time she attempted to climb up the stool, she lost her balance a little and said "oops!".

Some of the children saw it and started to giggle.

When she was getting ready to step onto the stool for the second time, the children were all paying attention to the scene.

The educator took the opportunity to lighten up the mood and pretended to lose her balance again while letting out a theatrical "oooooops!".

Every time she did it she was gratified with lots of laughter by the children and the approving looks of other people in the room.

This playful attitude allowed Rosa to gain get from the children.

(Field Journal - Researcher).

It was interesting to witness the spontaneity with which Rosa conducted herself in the situation. She managed to turn a potentially embarrassing situation into fun play. She revealed a whole new way to deal with such situations and it was different from the way she had been carrying herself in her procedures. This scene is the result of all the work done in supporting the educators and the experience of changing the way they look at the children under their care.

Taking care of educators by means of awareness

The experience, or even the possibility that something will happen to us or touch us, requires a gesture which is almost impossible nowadays: it requires taking a break. It involves taking a break to think, to pay attention, to really listen, to slow down, to assess things more carefully, to listen more carefully, to feel more carefully, to pay attention to details, to suspend opinion, to suspend judgement, to suspend will, to suspend the automatism of action, to cultivate attention and tenderness, to open our eyes and ears, to talk about what happens to us, to cultivate the

art of encounter, to cultivate patience, and to give ourselves time and space (Bondía, 1996, p. 24).

The inspiration for reflection over support for educators by means of attention to experience comes from the studies of Rodulfo (2012). The article "How to take care of an experience?" presented a comprehension of caretaking in which there was a difference between taking care of the possibility of experience and taking care as the omnipotence to cause someone else to have an experience. The question concerning what in fact experience is led to observations and the support for the possibility of emergence of spontaneous gestures, that is, gestures that do not conform to any action-reaction recipe. An epigraph such as the reflection by Jorge Bondía, which concerns experience and the importance of availability (something very challenging in our times), points at the same direction as the ideas of Rodulfo (2012) by means of expressing the importance of taking care of the emergence of experience.

In our observations with educators and the children at the nurseries we perceived that most often stress and pressure at their workplace caused many essential moments to go unnoticed. On days when educators and children were loaded with activities and tasks, we felt the necessity to draw their attention to simple moments, such as a game, a change of diapers, or a meal, when there was the possibility for a singular encounter between educator and child. We pointed at the importance of words, especially at moments when such encounter experiences happened spontaneously. At this third available place, we expected that there would be an opening for new things to happen: the encounter of educators with the children, or in my encounter with the educators.

According to Bondía (2002), the subject of experience is defined by receptivity, availability, openness and passivity rather than activity. This passivity, instead of an opposition between active and passive, consists of a position of compassion, patience and passion " as a primal receptivity, a fundamental availability, and an essential openness" (p. 24). Besides that, experience, due to the fact that it is impossible to predict its effects, does not consist of a route to an objective or a predetermined goal. Instead, experience consists of openness to the unknown, to what we cannot predict or anticipate (p. 19).

According to Educator Margarida, the possibility of having conversations about her work with the children caused a very perceptible reflexive moment by means of their words and action. The educator changed her relationship with her job. With this educator something different happened: Margarida seemed in fact willing to reflect on her position at work and the possibility to get pleasant surprises.

Part of it is due to the work you have been doing, right? Your observations...

Our job (as an educator) is very demanding. There is so much to do, you see. Sometimes we get so busy it is hard to realize things. It is hard to stop and think. You just think of an activity that you are going to develop and you go there and do it. But you never have the time to think about yourself as you do it, what really is happening, you see. So it is great when someone comes from outside and looks at things differently. It makes you look at things too. (Interview- Margarida).

Bondía (2002) also reminds us of the logic of general destruction in experience. Educational apparatus are increasingly conducive to a situation in which it is impossible for something to happen to individuals, that is, for experience to happen. In this sense, he attributed the obstacles for experience to the generalized, perverted performance of the information/opinion duo and of speed. Concerning speed, Bondía explains that, although professionals spend more and more time at educational institutions, they have less time to do things. Educational professionals, guided by the need for speedy, permanent and constantly updated formation, end up turning time into a commodity. They cannot waste time and must maximize its use. "At school, curricula are organized in packages increasingly numerous and short. As a result, we are always in a hurry and nothing happens to us" (p. 23). This reflection contributes a lot to our reflection over the speech of Educator Margarida. In one of our conversations with the educators supported by the Porto Alegre project, Margarida mentioned the concern by nursery educators over the routine activities and timetables. She said that she started to pay special attention to moments to routine activities and these began to be felt as true experiences. She also drew our attention to the words "waste time", in the sense that it would be a good idea to use the time they already had for routine procedures in order to promote a closer encounter with the children:

We end up falling into a rut by doing things automatically:

Now it is time to do this and that. Time is excessively dedicated to obligations.

We never have time, everything is done in such a rush. We keep saying "no, no, no" all the time. We should be more at ease. We used to have time even for the children who stayed quiet and didn't demand for much attention. Now we "waste time" changing diapers, we chat more. We don't follow the rules so strictly. We can do everything and better... you gotta be open-minded to change. The

way we do things has changed. Having someone to observe makes you more aware of your work (Field journal - researcher).

The observations of Educator Margarida, in addition to pointing at the carefor experience, contributed to reflections over self-care. In this same direction, Guimarães (2008), when thinking about the dimension of caretaking in the context of Child Education, took on the work of Foucault (2004) concerning self-care as an issue-raising movement and a work of self-development from an ethical perspective. In this sense, the last studies by Foucault intended to reflect on individual-truth relations while emphasizing old-world selfcare practices, a work of permanent reflection over oneself and the ties of power. Foucault (2004), in an interview realized by the International Philosophy Magazine, mentioned the interference by power relations on human relations such as the pedagogical, political and family relations. The power relations, when flexible and dynamic, lead to liberty practices. When power relations are fixed, irreversible and motionless, they become states of domination where liberty practices are not possible. Thus, Foucault explained that in the Greco-Roman world, selfcare became the means by which individual freedom could be considered as ethical.

Foucault (2004) also stated that it was not possible to take care of someone else without selfcare and that selfcare is impossible without self awareness. Foucault's argument concerning the particular position of the philosopher as the one who cares for the care of others makes us think of the possibilities for the work of psychoanalysts in the caretaking of educators. In other words, in this caretaking there is the possibility, by means of listening and spreading the word, of allowing educators to realize some work on themselves, that is, to take care of themselves. Likewise, it is important for educators to be able to work on themselves in order to take good care of the children and even of themselves. According to Figueiredo (2012), the mutualness of caretaking, which means the combination of taking care of oneself and letting others do it, is one of the most important ethical principles of the caretaking to be experienced and transmitted.

Thus, Guimarães (2008), based on an amplified notion of education, suggested selfcare allowed educators to reflect on themselves in addition to an amplification of their understanding of their own work and of the children. Thus, inspired by Foucault's ideas, the author proposed a work of education and support for educators: "Education as a tension between the tranquility of constructed knowledge and movement, a permanent questioning of safe places. Caretaking is an opportunity for self awareness, a constant transformation of the self by means of constant

movement out of pre-fixed social places” (p. 10).

In the same direction, Marin (2015) emphasized the ethical position of caretakers as an opening to the unknown: “That is... an encounter with the foreigner part of oneself, the childlike, the abandonment, the hostility, the repressed passions” (p.10). Rubin and Besset (2007) thought that the giving of spaces for expression could be a possibility to give a possible treatment to the reality that imposes itself in a peculiar way nowadays in the field of education. The availability of such spaces allow educators to share experiences with other educators. The spaces for spreading the word create the possibility of building a meaning for experiences, discomforts and desires.

According to Almeida (2009), in a proposal for formation guided by a clinical attitude, the psychoanalysis professional intends to make the other one speak and to listen carefully in order to generate a reflection over subjective, psycho-social, institutional, and relation dimensions present in educational practices. “The clinical framework is conducive to the reconstruction, in context, of the professional identity of the teacher and a re-signification of practices, a new relation with knowledge and with otherness and the creation of a unique individual style...” (s.p.).

It is important to emphasize that the support provided to educators and children by means of the IRDI methodology and its direct introduction into everyday life, that is, the act of being with these individuals proved an important possibility for caretaking and reflection, which contributed directly to the specifications of intervention and caretaking for the context of nurseries. In this sense, since educators play a subjectivizing role for the children – which, in contrast with other educational contexts, implies the construction of a unique connection and of a closer physical relation – the presence of a third element, the psychoanalyst, is of great importance for the proposal of this work. In the position of a “third witness” (Benavides & Boukobza, 1997, p. 101), the psychoanalyst will be able to provide words that will help process the whole physical experience of educators and children and set them free from a strictly “body-to-body” relation while allowing educators to get closer to the children in order to help them feel safe. Thus, there is space for educators to put into words their feelings, concerns and wishes regarding the children and their jobs. With the help of someone who is there not only for company but also for support it is possible to find new ways to handle the children and the peculiarities of the nursery work.

These means to understand the position of the caretaker contribute to reflections over the function of professionals to take care of children. In addition, such reflections allowed us to think of the position of psychoanalysts as professional researchers regarding

their own research, their intervention and their writing. Thus, psychoanalysts can take care of their formation by means of analysis, supervision and theoretical studies (Freud, 1919/1996) in order to provide the foundation for the care to be offered to patients or to other individuals, even outside the clinical realm. Therefore, we raise issues concerning the importance of reflection over the possibility of institutional interventions and of educational policies in order to provide support for professionals working with small children as well as educators in general. It is important to highlight the fact that, although the experience described in this article has produced an effect on the possibilities for work on educators by means of proximity with professionals and their workplaces, there is still a lot to be done concerning caretaking not only in the context of nurseries but also in the context of education in general. Thus, it is fundamental to create spaces for the caretaking of educators by means of direct observations like the work we have done as well as by means of other types of intervention such as the use of round tables for discussion or art (literature or writing). We consider that the development of a child is a process constantly under construction, where caretaking by others is fundamental (Bernardino, 2004). Likewise we believe that educators are always evolving. In other words, educators are always going through a process of self-development in which they constantly change the way they look at, say and do things.

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