

THE PEDAGOGICAL INTERNSHIP DURING THE LOCKDOWN: NARRATIVES OF FUTURE TEACHERS

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Abstract

The pedagogical internship is considered by future teachers as a determining factor in the whole process of initial training, occupying a significant place. It involves moments of authentic and experiential knowledge of the school, and its public, as well as of the teaching and learning process, always with the aim of forming reflective professionals and concomitantly researchers of their practices. That is, a future professional socially committed and able to introduce significant changes in their practices and pedagogical innovation. In times of pandemic caused by COVID-19, which led to lockdown, non-face-to-face teaching practices were privileged in different educational institutions and future teachers, in a probationary situation, were invited to participate. In this scenario, the pedagogical internship required overcoming and (re)adaptation [1]. This article has as main objective to carry out a documentary analysis of 10 final reports of Supervised Teaching Practice to understand how future teachers narrate their experiences during the pedagogical internship and understand how they managed to cope with the constraints that the lockdown produced in the school in years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021. The investigative process follows a qualitative and interpretative approach, carried out through procedures of categorisation and cross-referencing of the data corpus. For data analysis we used MAXQDA (Software for Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research), to survey and content analysis of the information collected in the final reports. From the analysis of the data collected, it stands out that the use of digital tools contributed to enabling distance teaching and learning, making the practice more innovative, which allowed the dialogue in real-time, as well as a more or less close monitoring of the children, depending, of course, on the adaptation of the cooperating teachers to new technologies and on the integration, or not, of future teachers in the contact platforms that they maintained with the children.

Keywords: teacher training, teaching, and learning process, lockdown, final report.

1 INTRODUCTION

The profile of the master's degree program in Pre-school Education and Primary School Teaching is regulated in Portugal by the legal regime of professional qualification for pre-school, primary and secondary school teaching [2]. This Decree-Law also defines the training components of the curricular plan (see articles 7 to 12) and the minimum credits for obtaining the master's degree (see article 14.3): 120 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). The specific conditions for entry in this master also respect the assumptions laid down in Decree-Law No. 79/2014 [2], namely the completion of the Degree in Basic Education (Article 18), as well as the completion of an assessment test of oral and written command of the portuguese language and mastery of the fundamental rules of logical and critical argumentation (Article 17). The main training components are: Teaching area, General educational area, Specific didactics, and Supervised Teaching Practice (STP).

In the context of the STP, a pedagogical internship is planned, developing research activities integrated into the pedagogical actions carried out in the context and this investigative component should be reflected in the Final Report (FR). It is in the course of this process "that research approaches pedagogy, in the sense of investigating it to aspire to the construction of relevant knowledge for its understanding and change, generating proposals for action to renew practices" [3, p. 780].

The training institution has its own regulation that defines the specific conditions for the realization of the curricular unit of STP, and we can read in number 2 of article 8 [4], referring to the FR, that it

must present, in a contextualized manner, teaching-learning experiences carried out during the Supervised Teaching Practice, covering the various levels of education or cycles of education

and subjects in the qualification, and critical reflection on them. This reflection should be supported in the scientific, pedagogical, and investigative literature of reference and in data from practice, showing the critical analysis of the intervention and the results obtained. [4, p.4]

However, in the school years 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 the proliferation of the pandemic, caused by SARS-CoV-2, better known as COVID-19, forced governments, worldwide, to close schools, which called into question, among other things related to education, the realization of the STP internships as it normally occurred, and therefore the preparation of the RF. Education professionals have had to adapt to this situation, and political and social decisions have had to be taken against the clock to minimize the negative impact of this pandemic, especially on school learning (from pre-school to higher education). In the Portuguese case, and about the 2019/2020 school year, and after activating the contingency educational plan, distance learning began in mid-March 2020, using online platforms, "understood as a possible solution to continue to ensure the training response under development" [1, p. 1487]. In the following school year (2020/2021) face-to-face teaching was restarted, but due to the evolution of the epidemiological situation, a new period of confinement with distance learning took place from the end of January to March 2021.

The students, future teachers, were thus confronted with a new school reality involved in substantial changes in the organization and functioning of STP. There was an immediate transition from face-to-face teaching to distance learning, and vocabulary such as "online teaching", "remote teaching", "digital learning platforms", "synchronous and asynchronous classes", "virtual space" quickly proliferated and began to be part of everyday life in educational settings.

2 METHODOLOGY

In terms of methodological option, we highlight that this research is framed within a qualitative approach. It is based on a documentary analysis of 10 Final Reports (FR) of Supervised Teaching Practice (STP), written by students, future teachers, of a professional master's degree course for teaching which, in this specific case, qualifies them to teach at the following levels: pre-school education and 1st cycle of basic education (CBE). Considering the FR of the Supervised Teaching Practice (STP) that the future teachers had to perform in times of turmoil caused by the pandemic (COVID-19), it was important for us to understand how they narrated their experiences during the STP and understand how they managed to deal with the restrictions that the closure of schools in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 caused in their pedagogical and investigative practices. To this end, we randomly selected 10 RF of STP (5 from each school year), to analyze their narratives and reflections around this question, according to Table 1.

Table1. Randomly selected Supervised Teaching Practice final reports.

<i>RF coding/future teacher</i>	<i>AR</i>	<i>RP</i>	<i>JT</i>	<i>IR</i>	<i>AM</i>	<i>AC</i>	<i>AL</i>	<i>DC</i>	<i>JR</i>	<i>CS</i>
Confinement period										
1 st confinement period (COVID-19) school year 2019/2020	X	X	X	X	X					
2 nd confinement period (COVID-19) school year 2020/2021						X	X	X	X	X

For data analysis, we used the content analysis technique, using the MAXQDA (Software for Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research) software (www.maxqda.com). As mentioned by Amado, Costa and Crusoe [5] the

The most important aspect of content analysis is that it allows, besides a rigorous and objective representation of the contents or elements of the messages (discourse, text, article, etc.) Through its codification and classification by categories and subcategories, the advancement (fruitful, systematic, verifiable and to some extent replicable) towards the capture of their full meaning. [5, p.306]

The analysis focused on the RF of the STP (object of public defense) of the students, future teachers, on the pedagogical and investigative options taken during the two periods of confinement decreed by the Portuguese government due to the pandemic. After reading the FRs submitted in times of pandemic, we considered the following categories of analysis, which were thought up a posteriori: *Pandemic COVID-19: constraints and challenges experienced; (re)adaptations to distance learning; teaching and learning process; and investigative part.*

3 RESULTS

The information collected in this study is organized according to the four categories of analysis showed in the earlier section, to describe and reflect on the experiences of the interns lived in times of pandemic by future teachers and portrayed in their internship Final Report (FR).

3.1 Pandemic COVID-19: constraints and challenges experienced

The fear of compromising the training and completion of the course by the future teachers was, in the first period of confinement, a cause of great concern for all those involved in this process and with responsibilities in the orientation and supervision of the STP.

The environment of fear and uncertainty experienced, is portrayed by the future teachers in two of the documents analyzed:

In this age of immediacy, we are flooded with information in the center of which death occupies a predominant place: wars, attacks, natural disasters, the COVID-19 pandemic, among other tragedies. (DC)

This virus (...) Has complicated the lives of the entire population (...) And made us realize that (...) We must have our lives under control and prepared for any unforeseen event that may happen, so that we can minimize the negative impact it may have on our lives. (jt)

In all documents, the eventful course of development of the internship in educational settings (kindergarten, preschool education or 1st cycle of basic education [1st CBE]) is reported, depending on the school year in which future teachers were developing the Supervised Teaching Practice (STP) (2019/2020 or 2020/2021). We present some excerpts that allow us to contextualize this assertion:

We started the (...) STP in the 1st CBE with two weeks of observation. In the third week we made our first, but also our last [face-to-face] interventions, due to the COVID-19 pandemic (...) which prevented us from carrying out the internship as we had intended, (...) until the end of the school year (2019/2020). (JT)

Our teaching internship was initially suspended due to this situation and days later we resumed with distance learning. This way of teaching was a novelty and we quickly had to familiarize ourselves with online sessions, synchronous and asynchronous sessions. (IR)

Throughout our educational practice we went through an unexpected situation with the emergence of COVID-19 and made it impossible for us to meet the established schedule of this class in person, in which it was necessary to readjust the schedule for holding classes by videoconference with other subject areas and, also, with the Home Study classes broadcast on RTP Memória. (RP)

This school year (2020-2021), and for reasons of the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to conduct the STP in the daycare context, and a large part of it was conducted using online platforms. (CS)

The pandemic situation, resulting from COVID 19, decided that the internship year had different contours from previous years. The practices took place in only two contexts: pre-school and primary school. (JR)

A future teacher mentions that although she did not have the opportunity to start her pedagogical intervention in the 1st CBE, "as in all other contexts, she went through a period of observation and cooperation" in which she was "able to observe the strategies the teacher used in the learning experiences she developed", considering them as fundamental to her training, "both professional and personal" (AR). In turn, one of the future teachers points out the limitations he faced in the change to distance learning, considering that "the contact with the children was quite limited", with the practice being developed through "an online platform, in which we could place works, just like the class teacher did, after having associated us with the proper authorization from the School Grouping and the Parents" (JT).

The children's school attendance is another identified constraint, referring, the future teacher AL, that: "the spread of the pandemic situation meant that (...) there were (...) repercussions on the children's daily attendance rate", with, after the period of confinement, "an increase in attendance".

Other constraints relate to the use of spaces and material resources, limiting the children's opportunities for interaction and recreation, considering that, even after the opening of the educational institutions, there were many restrictions on their use, requiring careful attention and reorganization to ensure the

necessary conditions of prevention and safety. Thus, in relation to the spaces available in the institutions it is referred:

Unlike previous years, the library was not available to all children, and a specific day was stipulated for each class to be able to use the library. (AC)

The outdoor space was not frequented by all children at the same time, because we all went through (...) that led to some restrictions, namely the prohibition of the use of playgrounds, [and] the class schedules were out of phase, so that each class could have a delimited outdoor space, not to be in physical contact with children from other classes. (DC)

In the cafeteria each class [was] divided by tables, and the children were not allowed to sit facing each other. (DC)

Regarding the activity/classroom it is pointed out that:

The tables were rectangular, interconnected so that the children sat in a zigzag pattern, at one table each [and] the chairs (...) identified with their names (...). This form of distribution of the tables in the room was reinvented so that there was greater physical distance. (DC)

There were many materials that were not available to the children because they were difficult to sanitize and disinfect, contrary to what they were used to. (CS)

The children could only choose one area and one toy, and no exchanges were allowed. This initially made us think, but it made the children use their imagination to use a toy in a different way for a certain period and make sense of that toy. (AC)

As AC's text makes clear, the measures taken during this period contributed to the children finding different ways to play and discover, challenging their imagination, as another student underlines: "the children used the yogurt packets to play ball. It was quite interesting to see how the children "manage" under circumstances where it was forbidden to bring toys from home to school" (CS).

Online teaching is perceived as limiting the development of the future teachers' pedagogical intervention, as the following passage illustrates:

This factor conditioned our practice, because we met some difficulties, such as: the duration of the online classes, which were of short duration; technical problems related to the network; the fluctuating attendance of children, not always all children were present; the search and use of resources, using ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] and right to distance learning. (JR)

As is implied from the narratives presented, there were several constraints that the future teachers identified as having arisen following the two moments of confinement that occurred, but also the challenges they presented to them. With the schools closed, the teachers turned to online platforms, trying to recreate, in the best way, other teaching and learning environments. Activities started to take place through online platforms or by sending work to be done by the children, or even video lessons (#EstudoEmCasa [#StudyAtHome]), in the case of 1st CBE.

3.2 (Re)adaptations to distance learning

It is noteworthy that the process of (re)adaptation to a new functioning of education and teaching institutions, according to a future teacher,

It was challenging and enriching, since we were faced with an atypical situation of a pandemic and it was necessary to adapt to the conditions we were allowed and apply another pedagogical model, namely, Distance Learning to give continuity to the teaching-learning process of the children. (RP)

He adds to his narrative that "some educators/teachers felt the need to invest in their training to improve their classroom practices, especially in distance education" (RP). Another student stresses that to make "quick and more assertive decisions it is necessary to be creative and critical, analyzing and reviewing the measures taken" (JT). He also points out that "the whole situation demanded a lot from us and tested our ability to adapt," but also supplied opportunities "to have new experiences and think of [various] ways to combat the problems that arose (JT). Overall, the prospective teachers involved in the study, narrate the importance of this re-adaptation to distance learning, having been clearer in some cases than others:

We had to adapt to the new reality, and this internship consisted of distance learning, or rather, of going with the cooperating teacher in online classes. The cooperating teacher organized a schedule that included synchronous classes in the online platform ZOOM, twice a week, more specifically on Mondays and Thursdays, and had a duration of about 1h30min. We emphasize that although synchronous classes were scheduled twice a week, if there were any doubts or if a child felt the need to obtain specific clarification in private or in a large group, a new synchronous class was scheduled, so that we could be present, check and help the child's teaching process, even at a distance. (IR)

We had to plan synchronous lessons (by videoconference), and asynchronous lessons (autonomous work by the children). (DC)

We had to find other strategies, and, in this sense, our activities were more directed to the use of ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] and its resources (forms, videos, platforms), since our goal was to implement robot dynamics in person, and this did not become possible. (RP)

We had to use information and communication technologies to keep in touch with the children from our homes. (AR)

This future teacher also describes a learning experience, in which she mentions that "it was planned and carried out at a distance (...), using the new technologies through the Webex Cisco Meet platform. (AR). Another future teacher also reports on his experience with online teaching, saying he used "materials, such as texts and PowerPoint presentations, which we put on the class platform and then the children solved and took pictures of the resolution and sent them to us. (JT). In turn, IR underlines the creation of digital platforms to address educational continuity, at the time of the first confinement, in which some future teachers were integrated:

Google Classroom was designed and created especially for teachers and their students, to help the contact and relationship between students and children, in times of pandemic, since the platform allowed a closer contact between both parties (...). It was our goal that the child would be able to enter the Google Classroom platform autonomously, download the necessary documents and perform all the tasks by himself, and finally, that he would be able to post the work done on the platform, so that teachers could correct and evaluate it. (IR)

Motivation is highlighted by RP as "one of the significant factors for the process of virtual classes", since, according to his point of view, "if motivation exists, technical skills can be acquired as needed" and he adds:

This factor [motivation] was perceptible in our videoconference classes, although it became a complicated process, especially in the issue of supporting each child individually, because not all children expressed their doubts and completely dominated certain platforms and technological tools. However, it was not impossible since the teachers and trainees were always available and attentive to the children to overcome their difficulties, through screen sharing on the Cisco Webex platform, corrections of the tasks placed on the Google Classroom platform, individual and group dialogues with the children, etc. (RP)

Of the (re)adaptations to online teaching, the use of diversified digital platforms and resources stands out, as well as the importance these assumed to ensure all children the necessary educational continuity in distance learning. The future teachers looked to mobilize their knowledge by adapting it to new ways of thinking and acting.

3.3 Teaching and learning process

In the STP, as the future teacher AR points out "not everything happens as we imagine" and it is important that each one is aware of the "difficulties", the "fears" and the "doubts" that they face or may face. In this context, he talks about aspects that were questioned and the path to overcoming them, mentioning:

for example, how to manage and organize routines and pedagogical times? How to select strategies? How to act according to a certain behavior or some unexpected conflict among children? How to create situations of coordination between the different areas of knowledge? These, and other questions, we have been overcoming them over time, with a lot of work, dedication, and reflection. We believe that this whole journey allowed us to grow as people, and (...) that even with the constraints we experienced in the pandemic, our training was very rich and provided us with multiple learning opportunities from the point of view of personal and professional development, with the certainty that we are always learning.

Some future teachers point out how the learning process of the children and their intervention developed during distance learning.

The synchronous classes, in the first part, had as main goal to interact with the children and the children interact among themselves. They followed with the clarification of doubts and difficulties of the children in performing the proposed exercises and by the #EstudoEmCasa [#StudyAtHome] and, finally, there was a moment of review of several themes, explored in a more playful way. (IR)

During the period of confinement, the pedagogical time was organized as follows: on Mondays we sent, through the WhatsApp application, the Weekly Plan with the activities for parents to develop with their children. Every day we interacted through this application. Parents sent photos, videos of the activities and their feedback. On Fridays, at 6:30 pm, through the ZOOM platform, we met with parents and children to talk about the week, taking stock of the week, difficulties, achievements, and a group activity. (AL)

We worked daily with different platforms, such as Google Forms, Quizzes, Kahoots, Educaplay games, instructional videos, Padlets, and we tried to find different educational platforms. The key was to have scientific rigor and diversity, to captivate and motivate the children. (IR)

This future teacher (IR) also explains the way she planned, saying that:

To carry out the weekly planning we followed the proposals of the #EstudoEmCasa [#StudyAtHome] program, which was created due to the pandemic and designed especially for children who did not have the possibility or ease of access to the internet and resources provided in the application or by their teachers. The #EstudoEmCasa program was broadcast on weekdays, between 9am and 5:50pm, on the RTP Memória channel ensuring that everyone with television at home could follow. However, there were other means to watch such as on cable, RTP Play and the #EstudoEmCasa app. (IR)

The concern in organizing and carrying out activities that favor the involvement of children and enable the articulation of the various curricular learning areas is highlighted by the future teachers in the following texts:

The strategies implemented were thought out in detail and for each content and context. We intervened, proposing challenging and motivating activities, enabling the development of more skills, always based on the official reference documents, combining this with the promotion of moments of curricular articulation with the other areas, developing the learning inherent to them. (AM)

It was possible to interconnect and work the various curricular components, using various resources and giving freedom to the children to produce works the way they wanted and with the materials they had at their disposal. (CS)

We consider that we have carried out a practice using diversified materials and strategies, proposing challenging and motivating activities (...), based on the official and guiding documents of the educational practice (...), in a perspective of curricular articulation. (IR)

As for the teaching and learning process, the diversification of intervention strategies that teachers and future teachers used, the valorization of available digital resources, and the effort made to assure learning opportunities for the children and the necessary support to make them happen, should be highlighted. It also highlights the concern that all children should be able to appropriate the learning that is considered essential, valuing in this process the use of interdisciplinary approaches.

3.4 Investigative part

About the research that is supposed to go with the development of the Supervised Teaching Practice (STP), the future teachers showed awareness of its importance for their intervention and personal and professional training, but also of the difficulties experienced in collecting data for analysis, especially when inherent to the period of confinement. Therefore, also at the level of investigative action, they had to reinvent and readjust procedures, as the following examples allow us to understand:

This whole path of research and intervention (...) was full of challenges and enriching in the learning, knowledge, and baggage construction of personal and professional training. (JR)

Was a challenging process (...) full of very significant learning, but (...) it also conditioned the research and the documentation of our practices, as we were not able to carry out what we intended in the 1st CBE context, in terms of developing learning experiences in person. (RP)

In the 1st grade educational context, it was not possible to achieve the aims of our research (...) we had to find other strategies and, thus, our activities were more focused on the use of ICT [Information and Communication Technologies] and its resources, since we intended to implement activities with robots in person and this did not become possible. (RP)

We recognize the limitations of the study developed within the scope of the STP and for which the temporary constraints contributed, especially those related to the pandemic crisis experienced, leading us to have to develop activities in the preschool context in a distance work regime, during five weeks. (AL)

In turn, a future teacher emphasizes her dissatisfaction about the limitations met in the implementation of planned activities that could allow her to expand data collection, saying:

we intended to develop strategies in which children would learn the contents in an articulated way, developing group spirit and teamwork (...). We felt some sadness and anguish for not having had the opportunity to put them into practice, because it would be essential for us to hear the children's opinions (...) [and] reflect together on our action. (AR)

The investigative part of the STP, as the future teachers underlined, was compromised, in terms of results, by the limitations they faced in data collection, in at least one of the internship contexts, due to the interruptions in face-to-face teaching that occurred. However, the reinvention and adaptation of the investigative action to the new educational scenario, which involved distance learning, deserves relevance in the documents analyzed.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show a wide range of constraints, but also challenges, experienced by a group of future teachers during their internship during the pandemic period. As for the constraints, we highlight those related to the change from face-to-face teaching to distance learning, which occurred during the periods of confinement, one in the school year 2019/2020 and the other in the school year 2021/2022, the climate of uncertainty and fear that was generated, and the limitations in data collection for the implementation of the intervention and research project on teaching practices.

In turn, the challenges faced were related to mobilizing knowledge and creating alternative learning opportunities, reorganizing spaces and materials to ensure the children's well-being and learning, as well as the time for activities and support to children. The future teachers highlight the role that the use of digital tools played to enable and implement the distance learning process, supplying the development of an innovative educational practice close to the children.

Based on the results it is also clear the importance of promoting a training that enables future teachers to face the growing uncertainty, complexity, and risk with which societies and, so schools are confronted.

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