

Teachers Dealing with Learning Difficulties during the Process of Schooling

Marlene Rozek¹, Claus Dieter Stobäus²

¹Postgraduate Program in Education, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

²Postgraduate Program in Education and in Biomedical Gerontology, Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

Email: stobaus@pucrs.br

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Abstract

This paper presents a survey that aimed to detect the main learning difficulties presented by children and adolescents who received care in a psycho-pedagogical support service of g to a university in Rio Grande do Sul, between 2011 and 2012. The theoretical framework takes into account authors of Pedagogy, Psychology, Educational Psychology and Inclusive Education. Data collected from medical records of 28 children were analyzed using Content Analysis. The results show a high rate of affective and emotional difficulties of these children. The findings demonstrate the importance of understanding the role of emotional processes in the development of learning disabilities. In addition, it is necessary to reflect on teacher education that problematizes this issues. Education should not be limited to the ownership of a technical instrumental that offers a recipe for efficiency. The development of an appropriate education for children with emotional difficulties necessarily requires a teaching practice that reflects on the teacher-student-family-school relationships, investing in building a dialogue that respects the coexistence between the sides, characterized by listening the other, discovering their desires, understanding and respecting the student as a person who brings/carries their own history with their difficulties. But they should always be seen as a subject endowed with potentialities.

Keywords

Learning Disabilities, Schooling, Teacher Education

1. Introduction

This study stems from the need to establish a more accurate diagnosis of the difficulties of the children who attended the psychopedagogical service, offered at a university in

Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. This service is based on three pillars: Education on issues related to the exercise of Pedagogy, Psychology and Inclusive education; Research in relation to these fields of activity; and Psycho-pedagogical care offered to external and internal community of the University.

By knowing the main learning difficulties presented by subjects who sought the assistance of psycho-pedagogical care in this institutional space, it is possible to qualify the care for these children and adolescents, in addition to their families and teachers at their schools, involved in each case.

On the other hand, the results obtained in this study open to the possibility of thinking to provide reflections that result in aid for teacher education, able to offer alternatives to deal with the issues of difficulties and consequent possible failure of the students at their school, a very present reality in our country. To better know the children and their learning difficulties, we can also reflect on a more qualified teaching posture, to meet the challenges inherent in the schooling process.

2. Theoretical Field

The difficulty of learning and non-learning can be understood as causes of failure at the school, which is seen as an inadequate response to student and school demands. These issues can be analyzed from different perspectives, according to Weiss (1992): society, school and subject. The social perspective is wider by encompass culture, conditions and the social, political and economic relations, the implicit and explicit ideologies of these aspects of school education. The second perspective refers to the analysis of the school at different levels, as the quality of teaching, methodologies, assessments, devaluation of teaching, teacher training, and these only some of the aspects that make up the educational framework of our reality. The third perspective concerns the individual and internal conditions of the learner, specifically, the intra-subjectivity, because if there is dissociation in the process, something is wrong in thinking, in speech, in action/interaction on and the world.

The three perspectives and the interconnection of some aspects allow the construction of a wider vision of multicausality of school failure phenomenon and enable a comprehensive approach to the subject in its multiple dimensions. Thus, organic, cognitive, emotional/affective, social and educational need must be carefully observed, so that we can understand and intervene in the issue of subject-family, in their context, seeking the causes that led to not learn or learn “obtrusively” (Weiss, 1992).

Among the mentioned aspects, we can see that the emotional components have been one of the very factors associated with learning problems in different studies (Barkley, 2006; Rutter, 1974; Rutter et al., 2008).

Currently, there is compelling evidence that academic deficits do not seem to improve over time (Greenbaum et al., 1996; Mattison, Hooper, & Glassberg, 2002), and the presence of comorbidity with emotional/behavioral disorders can make the “poorer prognosis” of the difficulty of the child (Hinshaw, 1992a, 1992b). Therefore, children with these characteristics are at high risk for school failure.

Authors like Nóvoa & Finger (1988); Nóvoa (1995, 2002); Pérez Gómez (1995); Sacristan (1995); Schon (1995) and Zeichner (1995) have argued for a teacher education that includes a more reflective practice, defined as the place of production of critical consciousness and qualified action, with no hierarchical separation between what you think and what you do.

3. Method

Participated in this study children and adolescents aged 7 to 16 years ($n = 28$) who sought the assistance of Psychology and Psychopedagogy, in the years 2011 and 2012, due to complaints of “learning difficulties” in their schooling process.

At first, there was a survey on the records of the participants. These documents contain the general data of the child/adolescent, their family, anamnesis interview with parents, the development report of psychopedagogical sessions, as well as the report of the global evaluation of different areas of the child (pedagogical, cognitive, social, emotional, corporal development). Through this survey, it was possible to know the main learning difficulties presented by the participants.

Note that the service at the Center for Research on Learning and Inclusive Processes-NEPAPI, was conducted by students of the Specialization in Psychopedagogy, during their clinical training, properly supervised by specialist teachers in this area.

This work is characterized by a qualitative/quantitative perspective. To Malhotra (2011: p. 122-123), while “*qualitative research provides better insight and understanding of the problem scenario. [...] Investigates the problem with some preconceived notions [...], quantitative research seeks to quantify the data*”. Justified thus the quantitative and qualitative approach, the researcher option to supplement the survey data.

The data records were analyzed by content analysis (Bardin, 2013: p. 42), whose interpretation was given from a qualitative analysis of quantitative data, and the content analysis seeks, through systematic and objective procedures, a description of the messages constituting a patient task of “unblinding”:

[...] a set of communication analysis techniques aiming for systematic procedures and content of the messages description of objectives, obtain quantitative indicators or not, that allow the inference of knowledge related to the conditions of production/reception of messages.

Therefore, following this approach, from an initial reading the data from medical records of children and adolescents at the Center for Research on Learning and Inclusive Processes-NEPAPI were analyzed by developing categories. The pre-established analysis categories (*a priori*) were as follows, based on the authors we used:

- 1) Difficulties in understanding, reading and interpretation (taking into account Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1985; Teberosky & Colomer, 2002; Soares, 2008; Tfouni, 2006).
- 2) Difficulties organic-affective (taking into account Pain, 1992; Weiss, 1994; Coll et al., 1996; Sisto et al., 1996).
- 3) Affective and emotional difficulties (difficulties of organization, attention, anxiety) (taking into account Rock, Fessler, & Church, 1997; Handwerk & Marshall, 1998).

4. Results

Figures 1-3 should be described in words in the results section. The three categories of learning difficulties should be discussed in a greater detail. Meanwhile, the different colors in Figure 3 should be pointed out.

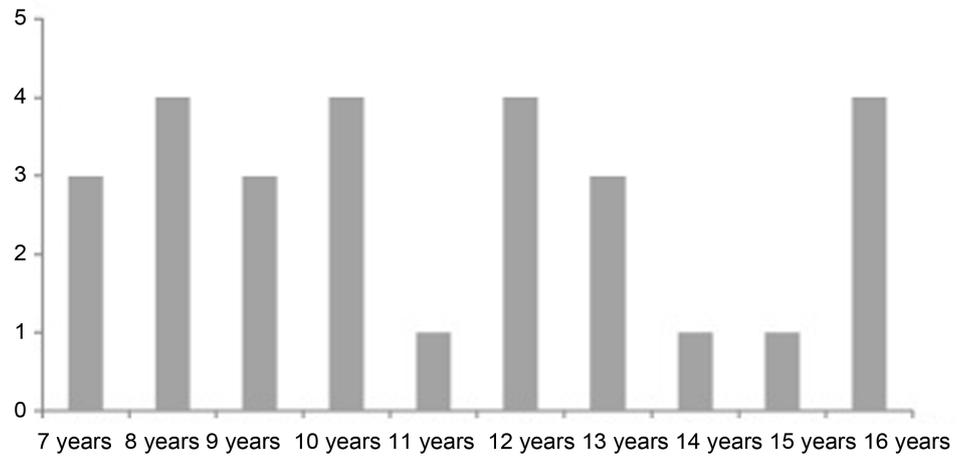


Figure 1. Distribution of the number of participants by age (n = 28).

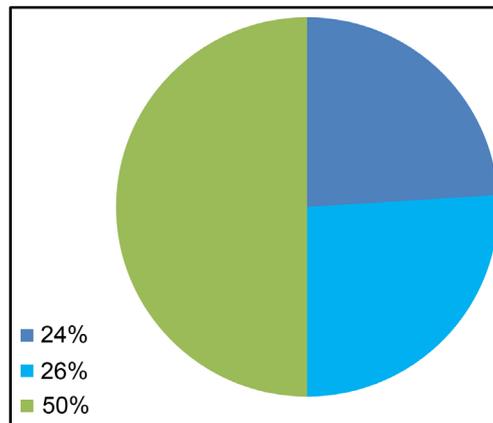


Figure 2. Analysis categories. ■ 24% Difficulties in understanding, reading and interpretation; ■ 26% organic-affective difficulties; ■ 50% affective and emotional difficulties (difficulties of organization, attention and anxiety).

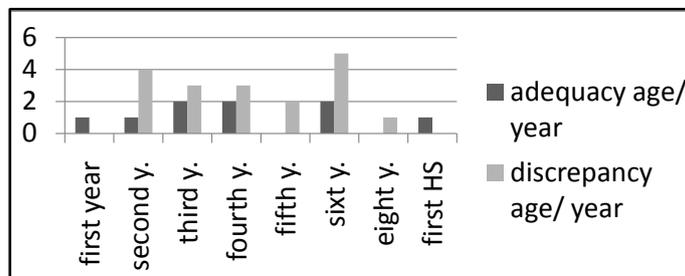


Figure 3. Adequacy of age per year of schooling.

Below are three Figures that express the main results of the survey of the records of the participants.

5. Discussion

According to **Figure 3**, we can see that the majority of treated subjects show discrepancy between their years of schooling and age. In this sense, from the results obtained we can say that they have an association between their learning problems and affective-emotional difficulties, maybe because symptoms in learning due to issues such as anxiety, lack of organization and difficulty to focus attention in school. One of the most frequent complaints of schools and teachers is precisely the lack of attention of their students. However, in attendance, it is clear that the lack of organization of the child and his/her family is in order to systematize the routine and study times. These aspects are evident as one of the factors associated with learning difficulties, as well as the child's anxiety to the demands and learning situations. These difficulties are manifested include 50% of the research subjects.

The relationship with organic-emotional difficulties also proved to be quite representative in this sample. This category refers to learning difficulties related to issues of neurological dysfunctions. These subjects had a lot of emotional difficulties in learning situations resulting from historical abandonment and repetition.

If we understand that emotional/behavior problems are related to both categories, so we can say that 76% of the subjects treated in the service are affected by any of these factors (50% with affective and emotional difficulties-difficulties of organization, attention and anxiety, and more 26% with organic-emotional difficulties). The third category of difficulties encountered in subjects refers to specific difficulties of written language-listening, reading and interpretation.

The results confirm the findings in the literature (Barkley, 2006; Rutter, 1974; Rutter et al., 2008), demonstrating the importance of thinking about the issues of learning or non-learning as a result of different dimensions: social, educational and those of the own subject. In the subjective dimension are the emotional/behavioral problems, also highlighted in the survey results.

Initially, both children and adolescents, sought the assistance of Psychopedagogy to diagnose what difficulty of learning was related to their poor academic performance. However, the survey data showed that, more than a difficulty to learn, also appears their own emotional problems. That can possibly explain the low academic performance of these students. Possible repercussions are also through detection of comprehension, reading and interpretation difficulties (the remaining 24%).

For a more effective education of the teachers, it is essential to understand the process of learning from a comprehensive approach, to the subject and its multiple dimensions, and all must (subject, their family, teachers and school) be aware of the interactions between the organic aspects, cognitive, emotional/affective, social and educational.

We also remember the emotional aspects as players from these intrapersonal and in-

terpersonal perspectives, carefully not always detected by teachers and even the family (Dohms, da Conceição Lettnin, Mendes, Mosquera, & Stobäus, 2014: p. 1791). We conclude, and it is not only for these interviewed university teachers, that:

From the results, it is possible to better understand the affection/feelings of university teachers is, first, directed to the Personal Aspects [1) Feelings/emotions in teaching; 2) Behavioral expression of feelings/emotions, 3) Self-concept in the environment educational, and 7) Affectivity for identification with the profession], second, focused on Social Aspects [4) Affectivity in interpersonal relations in the educational environment; 6) Affectivity as a facilitator/disturbing learning, and 8) Affectivity related to Health and Education and], finally, the Institutional Aspects [5) Affectivity in professional qualification], which, in general, makes us understand that, for the teachers interviewed, develop positive affectivity is very important in the educational context and depends on the individual formation, so it can be used positively in this environment as a tool for improving learning (interpersonal relationships) in a permeate of affection environment to allow reflection on the health of those involved, to modify it more positively.

Therefore, when training, both personal and professional, this teacher, elements must be considered in their education (Mendes, Dohms; da Conceição Lettnin, Mosquera, & Stobäus, 2016: p. 1444), and we emphasize that:

Knowing that teachers can experience both conditions, during their working lives, malaise as welfare, and that it will depend on how they deal with different situations in which they are teaching, we understand that the teachers themselves can also develop their resources in order to improve their quality of personal and professional life, through elements of Positive and Health Psychology, investing in their resilience, in coping strategies and developing aspects of his affectivity and healthier interpersonal relationships. Interventions are added elements held in educational realities.

Besides the construction itself of the subject's personality (from his childhood, passing adolescence and throughout adulthood) (Timm, Mosquera, & Stobäus, 2016: p. 1771), so that we can reflect on:

[...] some similarities between those looking for teaching and who exercises, however, others are modified along the professional path. The question of meaning and feeling in this profession is very strong and appears marked in both situations. Another strong factor is the issue of continuous learning, since those who choose this line of work, need to be constantly (re) learn, aiming to establish the needs of emerging and constantly changing in this segment.

In teachers education it is necessary remember these aspects, influences between the individual and the collective aspects of development, and the interrelation between intra and interrelationships.

If we remember that we must take into account aspects of identity (Rodrigues, Stobäus, & Mosquera, 2016: p. 1119), it should be noted that we must:

[...] make some links between the constituent elements of the construction of the identity concept in Psychology, with the Positive Psychology, among them well-being, self-esteem, self-image and resilience, trying to delineate the possibility of having the

identity (more) healthy, a possible object of study in the field of study. The fact that these concepts also are not static and are due to the subject's interactions with the environment in which it develops leads us to consider that this is a plausible way to add healthy identity of the Positive Psychology study objects.

Building self-esteem and more real self-image/sound should take into account (da Conceição Lettnin, Dohms, Mendes, Stobaus, Mosquera, & Jesus, 2015), and:

Cultural factors may influence these results and the environment in which students are placed can contribute to the construction of self-esteem, from interpersonal relationships present in their social context, the evaluation of each under their own experiences as success or failure, as well as the affective evaluation, which is the foundation for a more positive self-esteem.

We can complement, students, as well as teachers, also students' parents. Rozek & Stobäus (2016: p. 1959) in their article, conclude that:

Teachers' education must be also considered as a "hermeneutic relationship", just as a way of productive relationships, better if it is in the interpersonal relationships (preparation in the teacher-student, observing student-student, or also student-parents-society) [...]. We must also remember and reflect about other topics who influence, such as knowledge and skills of teachers who work in Special/Inclusive Education, including the concepts they use and how they see that it operates, as well as affectivity and healthier inter-personal relationships.

Even dealing with normal people, more walking to work with the area High Abilities/Giftedness (Mosquera, Stobäus, & Freitas, 2015: p. 654), we must care about:

[...] in the fields of Education, Psychology and Full Inclusion, with some supports of the Neurosciences and newly studies on brain aspects of cognition, intelligence, learning, and cultural influences, in which a subject develops and operates, seeking to explore some aspects of the human development and personality throughout life, relating to social and cultural learning, in the achievement of process of learning, ending with some possibilities on the attendance of those people, connecting with the Health and Positive Psychology.

As we said (Teixeira, Mosquera, & Stobäus, 2015: p. 1044), some of the reflection when we speak about teachers' education are:

[...] Difficulties and trouble-devalued as teachers, face problems in school and beyond, difficulty performing continuous and in-service education for lack of support of the family; Teaching and constant updates are necessary, especially about continuing evaluation, requiring monitoring with multi/interdisciplinary team, the necessity on observe minimal behavioral and cognitive changes are highlighted in the reports, [...].

In our research about motivation and the relation to other areas (Santos, Antunes, Mosquera, & Stobäus, 2016: p. 2011), we note that:

[...] and the categories we found are: 1) Initial conceptions that subjects bring on the subject motivation; 2) Relation between malaise/wellbeing and teacher's motivation; 3) Relation among self-image, self-esteem and motivation; 4) Cooperation for motivation in the profession. We stress the need and importance of conducting positive aspects re-

lated to the subjectivity aspects of the teacher and students' relationships, remembering that the three components (knowledge, skills and attitudes/affect) interact constantly. We still see that our field research needs to be expanded, with a view to provide continuing education for the teachers (also students and parents) to make them aware of the importance of motivation related to his/her well-being.

According to Weiss (1992), it is necessary find the causes that led to not learn through observation and understanding of the game of relationships. From this (re) knowledge and possible good and rapid interventions, it is possible to intervene better in problems detected in the subject-family-school interrelations.

If we understand this perspective as an opportunity to share in the rapid and early intervention process with a child with learning deficits, we must also reflect on some key issues in order to develop a more effective practice in the face of difficulty and non-learn. The first issue concerns the need for care services for children with difficulties in their education should offer a multidisciplinary work. In this sense, the work of a psychologist or a psychological service would be a fundamental alternative in the detection (and treatment, if necessary) of emotional issues related to learning problems. Also, in some cases, there may be need for a neuropsychological assessment, or psychopedagogical supervision and specialized teaching. Different dimensions are part of the phenomenon of difficulty to and non-learn, it seems logical that different professionals can intervene to evaluate and treat the different factors involved, returning the subject the ability to develop its full potential in the schooling process.

Following the prospect of Weiss (1992), it is necessary to look beyond the individual student. You also need to think about the teacher's performance in front of children with emotional issues in the classroom. In this sense, it seems important to think about the teacher education that, in essence, is directly related to the practice of the teacher.

To Marques (2003), the education means to break with the immediate and natural; means to remain open to the other, the distinct otherness and the many possibilities, the distinct and general points of view that cover other possible points of view. Education involves an extended space where everyone can move without constraints, has the ability to see everything with eyes always new, inquisitive and may have sensitivity and tact to perceive situations and requirements, which requires theoretical foundation of knowledge, built on tradition culture and construction of other (new) knowledge.

The complexity of the exercise of the teaching profession requires constant education processes, where scientific knowledge can be reinterpreted and transformed into reflective consciousness, and the technique, converted into an instrument of reflective praxis of men in society.

Rozek (2010), reflecting on teaching and its development education, identity and didactic innovation, says the education to be linked to the life history of the subject, is in permanent construction process of transformation; therefore, never be ready, complete. It is not built by the accumulation of courses, techniques, knowledge, but through a critical reflection on work practices and (re) construction of a permanent personal identity. Herein lies the importance of investing in the subject and to give a status to

learn built by way of experience.

Authors like [Tierno & Escaja \(2003\)](#) believe that educational practice from the teacher's point of view, should not only be concerned with technical and methodological issues, but also be based on a personal contact attitude and meeting with the student. For the authors, there is a possibility that the best learning techniques fail when missing one teacher who is able to establish a relationship with his student.

However, [Pérez Gómez \(1995\)](#) warns that most educational research, the last thirty years, has developed from an epistemological conception of practice understood as technical or instrumental rationality. The concept of education as technological intervention, the design of teacher as coach, research paradigm based on process-product and teacher training for skills are very strong indicators of the size of the technical rationality model.

The teacher as a technical expression has its roots in technological design of professional activity, inherited conception of positivism that prevailed throughout the twentieth century, serving as a reference for education. According to this model of rationality, the activity of the professional is basically instrumental, directed at solving problems by applying scientific theories and techniques.

The main issue regarding the relationship between learning disabilities, emotional difficulties, would consider alternatives in teacher education that enable the exercise of a pedagogical approach concerned with students in a vulnerable situation in their schooling process. For this, we believe that its operations must go beyond the technicalities of the teacher issue, making room for a perspective that considers subjectivity and interpersonal relationships, focusing on the links that mediate interactions between teachers and their students. The language of the look, tone of voice, body movement, and the expectations that are built in the pedagogical relationship surely leave records in the subjectivity of each and mobilize the cognitive apparatus of the student, interfering thus in its processes of learning.

Million dollar investments will never reach to form a single student; but one master, responsible for its mission, is able to train a number of them. Money is needed; but education of the human being, itself, is not a goal to be achieved with money but with people. They are the material, but the enthusiasm and the vocation of teachers, which transform the outmoded structures of an educational system in living stones of an effective process of culture and humanism ([Tierno & Escaja, 2003: p. 125](#)).

Learning does not take place only in the cognitive level. For it to happen in a meaningful way, it is necessary that the affective, emotional, organic, cognitive, physical and relational dimensions are balanced ([Mattison, Hooper, & Glassberg, 2002](#)). The child, when feels it is accepted, understood, valued and respected, has great possibilities to develop better in their schooling process. The way we perceive and value ourselves largely determines how we behave, how we deal with our lives, we conduct ourselves. This logic is not different for children with emotional problems.

In this sense, a child growing up in a negative experience at school, marked by difficulties in their performance, which raises the possibility of school failure, it has also

been affected in their self-esteem as a whole and, consequently, in their development as a person. We cannot forget that the school, in addition to exercising its essential function is to mediate the knowledge to new generations and appropriation of the accumulated culture for humanity, it must also be a space in which the student can experience relationships that help to develop as a subject full and ready for the experience of higher learning that is life as a whole. Reflecting on the importance of establishing a good relationship with children with learning problems is a greater sense, preventive work in relation to the child's overall development.

Another aspect to be considered is the need to think in a nearby teacher training practical experience of the teacher. In this sense, it seems inevitable to build a space that addresses the difficulties present on the day of his pedagogical activity, able to equip teachers to deal with your reality. Considering this perspective and the research findings, it seems coherent thinking of a formation that also discuss the role of the teacher-student relationship in the development and learning processes, and how to rescue all the power to learn from students with emotional difficulties.

For Pérez Gómez (1995: p. 109), the most significant and widespread failure of training programs lies in the gulf between theory and practice, and the failure of teacher education in institutions, widely recognized in Spain, is the result of technical rationality model underlying the design of practice and training of professionals. With the crisis in this model, *“the attentions turn to a more artistic design of the teaching profession and training models to prepare teachers for the exercise of this art in different situations in practice”*.

In the daily professional practice, the teacher is faced with many situations for which there is pre-prepared answers; also cannot analyze them by the classical scientific research process. In everyday practice, dialogue with the situation reveals hidden aspects of reality and ends up creating new benchmarks, new ways and perspectives to understand and respond/act. The realities are created and build up the psychosocial school interactions. In this perspective, in situations resulting from the practice, there is no professional knowledge for each case-problem. The professional acts and intervenes reflecting the action/situation, experiencing, believing, mobilizing, making through dialogue established with the same reality. This new knowledge is incorporated and built it transcends the emerging knowledge of technical rationality (Pérez Gómez, 1995).

In general, the training of teachers has ignored the personal dimension of the teacher, for Nóvoa (1995: p. 24), *“not realizing that the logic of educational activity does not always coincide with the dynamics of his own formation”*.

According to Moita (2002), the concept of training is taken not only as a learning activity carried out in time and precise spaces, but also as a vital action of building itself. Form is supposed exchanges, experiences, interactions, learning, teaching, endless relations; a journey of life is a training course. Therefore, recognizing the teacher's experience, interactions with students with difficulties in school may be the first step to think of intervention strategies with this child. You must restore the value and knowledge of the teacher as a professional dedicated to human development.

For Tardif (2002: p. 228), there is a central tenet in relation to subjectivity, which has conducted research on the knowledge of teachers in the last twenty years they have specific knowledge that mobilize, use and produce within their daily practices; occupy in school a key position on the set of school stakeholders, i.e. “*they are the main actors and mediators of culture and school knowledge*”, and thus “*take an interest in knowledge and by their subjectivity is trying to penetrate the very heart of the concrete learning process as it takes place*”.

Become a teacher, be teacher and is a production of itself that makes the dynamics of society and culture. Production of being a teacher cannot be an a priori definition; rather, it is a whole contingency constitution of the pedagogical, the subject in practice and practice. The training needs to recognize and value the personal as well as professional experience of the subject teacher. The construction and reconfiguration of subjectivities cannot be detached from the formation of the subject teacher. It is in this context of intense and complex relationships, the teacher constitutes, and the different experienced and lived moments become processes of such training.

You can see the emergence of a formation that respects the daily practice of the teacher, considering his knowledge experiential that is built into the very construction of its history as a teacher. For Patto et al. (2004), the training is more than domain knowledge in a given subject area and learning methods and teaching or research techniques; without denying the relevance of these, the author insists that education is primarily a permanent exercise of living presence in the world; It must be seen within the ethical commitment perspective.

Catani et al. (1997) point out in their research, the importance of teachers’ narrative in order to resize the experience of training and career paths in the search for new ways of conducting pedagogical. The construction itself is therefore a process of formation traversed by different sources of movement.

6. Conclusion

From the results of research conducted with children with learning difficulties, it was detected a significant association with emotional difficulties. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a broader view of not learning, recognizing the multicausality phenomenon. In this perspective, the complexity of the human being and its vicissitudes require, whenever possible, that professionals from different areas can work on understanding and building intervention possibilities that allow the child to develop their full potential to learn. In this sense, teachers, psychologists, educators and others need to work with their different knowledge, aiming to build a strategy that allows the child to reverse the logic of not learn.

On the other hand, it is also important to rethink the teacher’s role in these cases, questioning their own teacher training that ultimately provides the basis of his pedagogical work. We see the need for training is not merely technical, but makes room for subjectivity and the establishment of a relationship with the child able to transform the student experience in the classroom, positively interfering in its subjectivity and mobi-

lizing it new learning processes.

Starting from such considerations, the emergency is perceived a pedagogical approach that assumes a conception of being in the world in constant relation, a socio-historical construction. The learning implies a dynamic relationship of the subject in the social context; all learning is linked to very specific meanings for each subject entered in the subjectivity of each through the movements of time and history. This exchange with the context and the affections causes emotions and also emotional problems. These interact with cognition, affect the relationship with the teacher, family and can cause a blockage in learning. Therefore, it requires not learning of the school, a discussion movement and intervention in their databases, and requires learning about their own practices.

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