

## CONSTRUCTION OF TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM: BEING THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHER AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF PERNAMBUCO



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### ABSTRACT

The study analyzes the construction of the teaching professionalism of Substitute Professors at UFPE, based on theoretical references and qualitative research involving 332 professionals until 2017. It explores the concept of professionalism, historically linked to union struggles and workers' capacities, and its evolution in the educational context. He highlights professional experience as the main reason to act as a substitute, despite challenges such as precarious working conditions.

**Keywords:** Teaching Professionalism. Substitute Professor.

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## INTRODUCTION

Situated in the field of teacher training, specifically with regard to the theme of teaching professionalism, with the focus of attention on the Substitute Teacher, this study aims to characterize elements that contributed to the process of construction of the teaching professionalism of professionals linked as Substitute Teacher (PS) at the Federal University of Pernambuco-(UFPE). To this end, it takes as a reference studies that focus on professionalism in general, among others, Barisi (1982), Dubar (1987) and Braem (2000); on teaching professionalism in particular, for example: Hoyle (1980), Demailly (1987), Contreras (2002) and Roldão (2005).

The term professionalism began to be outlined in Italy by the unions, when defending the interests of groups of workers. It should be said that there is an etymological lack of this term, since we do not find the definition for this word in dictionaries. However, the term professionalism has been used in the academic debate and discussing this term is a challenge to deal with a concept under construction.

This debate points out that, as it is an integral part of the profession, professionalism is inscribed in a historical process of changes, as professional practice is articulated with the demands of the function attributed to it from a social, institutional and personal point of view.

It is worth noting here that Barisi (1982) was the one who first systematized a concept of professionalism. In his studies, this author mentions that in the Italian context the notion of professionalism promoted a structural change in the social organization of work. In the 1970s, the hierarchical position of each worker began to be revised and subjectivity became a central element in the classification system and in the struggle against the capitalist organization of labor.

The aforementioned author maintains that in the context of that time there were discussions about equal remuneration, equivalence of needs and duration of the working day and a struggle for the possibility of professional development for all workers. In this context of union demands and struggles, for Barisi (1982) professionalism was related to the workers' work capacity. Namely, according to Barisi (1982, p. 383), "the concept of professionalism was based on the capacities of the workers within the work process in which they are inserted". This author also emphasizes that this concept is not static, as professionalism is related to the economic and political evolution of the context.

## **THE SUBSTITUTE TEACHER: SOME NOTES**

The substitute teacher is a professional with a temporary contract, supported by Law 8745/93 (BRASIL, 1993), who works in the classroom in the training of bachelors and graduates. The professionals who are linked as substitute teachers have heterogeneous academic training (from undergraduate to post-doctorate), do not always have professional experience, either as a teacher in basic education or in another function, often they are still students of postgraduate courses.

The increase in the number of substitute teachers hired in Higher Education Institutions in Brazil has been the focus of attention of some scholars in the field of education in recent times. The scientific production on the substitute teacher is still timid, that is, it has been characterized by few studies. Accentuating this lack of production in Brazil, there is an intense expansion of the presence of these professionals in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

This growth has already been pointed out when observing the high number of hires of temporary professionals teaching in higher education. From this perspective, the interest in developing an article on this theme is due to the fact that during the five years of the Pedagogy course, we had the opportunity to have contact with substitute teachers and, later, we had the opportunity to join as a substitute teacher at the University of Pernambuco, where we had knowledge of aspects of the routine of these professionals, mainly related to the organization and planning of classes.

## **METHODOLOGY**

As it is a study that involves people situated in a time-space, this work used the qualitative research approach in education, referenced in Minayo (2001). The field of research was the Federal University of Pernambuco, and had the participation of 332 professionals who worked as substitute professors at the university until 2017.2, who answered an online questionnaire. The choice of this locus arose from concerns around it, accumulated since the initial periods of the Pedagogy course, a space in which I had contact with teachers at the beginning of their careers from different disciplines, particularly, assuming the condition of substitute.

The participants of the research were professionals linked in 2017.2 and also professionals who had a contract as a Substitute Professor at UFPE until 2017.<sup>13</sup>, who were listed in a spreadsheet provided by Progepe (Pro-Rector of People Management) for the period from 1996 to 2017 in which the name, Center/Department and hiring period were included. The choice for this period was to encompass a larger number of professionals who had or were linked as a substitute.

We chose to use the questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. The choice of the questionnaire is based on the understanding, among others, of Duffy (1993) and Babbie (2003). The online questionnaire included closed and open questions and allowed a characterization of the public of teachers who participated in the research. There was no resistance to obtaining the data collected via questionnaire. In summary, we had good feedback of responses.

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

To treat the collected material, we took as a basis the technique of content analysis, proposed by Bardin (2006). Adopting this analytical support implies interpreting information, apprehending and refining its meanings. With this tool, the data is organized and arranged into categories. It is up to the researcher to draw inferences about the material under analysis.

The following categories were considered: **Conceptions of teaching at the university; Reasons that led professionals to act as Substitute Teachers; Working conditions of Substitute Professor at UFPE and, finally, Elements that contributed to the process of building the teaching professionalism of professionals who worked as Substitute Professor at UFPE.** The categories are explained below.

## CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING IN THE UNIVERSITY

It is understood that the conception of teaching in the university is a fundamental starting point for dealing with the process of construction of teaching professionalism. In this case, the conception guides the action and can be modified in it.

It is worth making a brief consideration about the conceptions of teaching based on the socioeconomic transformations that have occurred since the middle of the twentieth

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<sup>3</sup> The survey of the contact of possible participants was carried out in 2017.2, for this reason we only had access to the data of professionals hired as Substitute Professors until this semester.

century. In this case, it is worth noting that, although there is still an appreciation of disciplinary knowledge, teaching at the university has been pointing to a recognition that such action requires more than the domain of the disciplinary field.

In this context, there are some conceptions of teaching that are consolidating and these conceptions are influencing teaching and consequently the construction of professionalism. It is important to highlight that teaching at the university has been constituted from paradigms that are sometimes consistent with a traditional perspective and sometimes consistent with a critical perspective of teaching. In Chart 1 below, about what they consider about university teaching.

Chart 1 - Conceptions of Teaching in the University

Conceptions of Teaching at the University	Percentage
Train professionals and citizens	50%
Teaching, Research and Extension	12%
Vocation	7%
Interact with areas of knowledge and exchange experiences	5%
Other	26%

Source: The authors

For most of the participants, teaching at the university is to train professionals and citizens, followed by the vision of teaching as Teaching, Research and Extension. There were also participants who conceive teaching at the university as a vocation. This last conception, by showing that in order to teach it is necessary to be vocational, distances itself from the importance of having training and investing in teacher professionalization processes. Still in the scope of conceptions, for some of the participants, teaching at the university is interacting with areas of knowledge and exchanging experiences.

Regarding the conception of teaching as training professionals and citizens, we bring some testimonies to illustrate.

It is to contribute to the development of future professionals, it is to contribute to scientific and societal development. (10CAC)

It is the professional practice that contributes to the training of other professionals. Thus, I consider it of the highest importance for the professional qualification environment. (05CCSA)

It is responsible for the training of citizens and professionals who will play the various roles in society. (06CTG)

In these testimonies, the participants conceive teaching at the university as focused on scientific training and, in some cases, also directed to the professional as a human

person. In other words, combined with professional training, educating citizens is as important as academic training.

These testimonies are related to what is defended by Pimenta and Anastasiou (2002, p. 81): "educating at the university means at the same time preparing young people to rise to the level of the current civilization of its wealth and its problems, so that they can act there".

In the data collection, we also found answers related to the articulation of teaching and research, notably related to the function of Teaching, Research and Extension, according to the following statements:

A space for teaching, research and extension, in favor of the training of future professionals and the commitment to the social function of the university. (10CAA)

Being a professor at a university requires a solid background on the tripod of Teaching, Research and Extension. This only happens if there is the possibility of experiencing it throughout the training process. [...]. (16CFCH)  
Teaching, Research, Extension, training of qualified professionals and a means of helping society. (02 CIn)

These testimonies make clear the conception of teaching in the university linked to the relationship between Teaching, Research and Extension. This conception signals that it is close to the understanding of Rios (2010, p. 232) that "the university is an institutional space in which teaching, research and extension are articulated, with the purpose of training critical and creative professionals, capable of building, with their work, a democratic society".

Another conception explained by the participants was teaching as a vocation, as shown in the following statements:

A vocation. I usually say that I am an engineer by training and a teacher by vocation. (23CCSA)

It is a work of vocation, donation and love. Teaching is very rewarding, however, it needs to be more valued at all levels. (36CCS)

A mission. (11CTG)

For the group of professionals to whom the above statements refer, university teaching is a vocation. We call attention to the fact that in the university it is not common to conceive of teaching as a vocation. This association of teaching with vocation and mission contributes to the mischaracterization of teaching as a profession, where the mission of teaching overlaps with the process of teacher professionalization.

## REASONS THAT LED PROFESSIONALS TO ACT AS SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

In the literature on Substitute Teachers, it was common to find scholars who, when dealing with the subject, brought to the debate the reasons that led professionals to act as substitutes, such as Koehler (2006), Aimi (2010) and Silva (2016). According to the study by Koehler (2006), the reasons given for working as SP were: the desire to be a teacher and experience; desire to transmit what he learned in graduation; and, finally, the growth of students.

Our study, in addition to ratifying such reasons, especially with regard to professional experience, had the issue of *liking to teach* and the *vocation* that led professionals to work as HCWs at UFPE. In the following table, we list the reasons explained by the participants.

Chart 2 - Reasons to act as a Substitute Professor

Reasons to act as an OS	Percentage
Professional experience	64%
Enjoy teaching	10%
Job Opportunity/Income	8%
Experience and Salary	7%
Vocation/Dream/Personal desire/achievement Profile/Affinity	5%
Monitoring/Residency/Degree	2%
Other	4%

Source: The authors.

The issue of professional experience had the highest percentage (64%) as a reason to act as a substitute, as shown below.

Gain experience in teaching activities. (12CCSA)  
To acquire initial teaching experience and adapt to the reality of UFPE. (11CCS)  
To gain career experience. (01 CIn)

I was studying for a doctorate and wanted to have experience in the area of knowledge. (07 CFCH)  
To have an academic professional experience. (01CAA)

The reason related to professional experience was common to participants from all UFPE centers. In this regard, Aimi (2010, p. 76) states that "the experience as a substitute marks a preparation prior to the teaching career". In this case, such an experience, in addition to providing an experience in the classroom, would serve to enrich the academic curriculum, as revealed in the following statements:

To improve my resume. (01CCJ)

Professional experience and curricular qualification. (01CAC)



Seek more teaching and curricular experience in a Public University. (16CAV)  
Interest in becoming an effective professor of higher education (3rd degree).  
(15CCS)

This question of experience was also ratified when we asked the participants if they would encourage a person to work as a substitute teacher: 96% of the participants answered *yes* and only 4% answered *no*. And as for those who answered affirmatively, the reasons for encouraging a person to act as a HCP are found in Chart 3 presented below.

Chart 3 - Reasons to encourage a person to act as a Substitute Teacher

Reasons to encourage acting as a PS	Percentage
Experience and professional growth	73%
Opportunity	6%
Training	2%
Other	15%
I wouldn't encourage	4%

Source: The authors

In Chart 3, the issue of experience stands out with 73% of indications. The testimonies below ratify the importance of such an experience for professional life as well as curriculum.

Yes. I think it's a valid, professionally enriching academic experience. (25CCSA)  
Because the professional experience is excellent. (02CCEN)  
It is worth a lot as an experience. (09CCS)  
Experience in the career to later take the exam. (01CIn)  
To gain experience. (02CCJ)

Regarding the reasons for not encouraging a person to work as a SW, presented by 4% of the participants, working conditions stood out as the reason for the refusal.

No, due to the 2-year hiring time constraints. (48CCS)  
He had the largest workload in the Department of Letters (shamefully different from that of the other non-substitute professors) and earned half of the current minimum wage. The amount was so derisory that it did not even cover the costs of daily food and travel. (01CAC)

Because my experience was very difficult, because I was very disrespected as a professional by colleagues and technicians, but never by students. (07CAA)

These testimonies reveal that the excessive workload is part of the work routine of the ER and, in some cases, combined with the excessive workload, some substitutes are unable to reconcile work and study. In addition, the issue of professional disrespect from



colleagues and technicians was also made explicit. Regarding disrespect, Rates (2015) points out that the PS often comes up against prejudice and humiliation.

Within the scope of the results presented, we identified as reasons that led professionals to work or act as PS at UFPE: professional experience, liking to teach, job opportunity/income, experience and salary, vocation, others and monitoring/residency/licentiate, with professional experience being the most frequent reason.

## WORKING CONDITIONS OF SUBSTITUTE PROFESSORS AT UFPE

Academic studies on ER have focused on the working conditions of this professional, specifically focusing on negative conditions. In this regard, Rates (2015) found that these professionals live with a high workload and lack of autonomy in the work environment. With regard to the limits of working conditions, Chart 4 below brings together what was explained by the participants.

Chart 4 - Limits of working conditions at UFPE for acting as a Substitute Professor

Emerging categories	Percentage
Infrastructure (room, equipment, etc.)	49%
There were no limitations	18%
Activity restricted to Teaching activity	13%
Relationship at UFPE (welcoming, support, etc.)	5%
Other	15%

Source: The authors

The testimonies listed below reveal limits of working conditions at UFPE.

Excess Workload. (05CAV)

Some rooms were overcrowded. I have already had classes with more than 100 students enrolled. (02CCEN)

Workload in various disciplines, which change every semester, because it is difficult to update classes. (90CCS)

The imposition of teaching subjects that did not master the syllabus. (11CCSA)

Lack of physical structure (such as a work room) and lack of clear knowledge about the organizational structure. (17CCSA)

In the list of these testimonies, we identified that the limits in the working conditions of the Substitute Professor are mainly found in the lack of infrastructure of the university (49%) and in the intensification of academic activities, having as an example the high workload that the substitutes assume, not to mention that in some cases the ER assumes

disciplines that diverge from the area of study, as pointed out by Aimi (2010, p. 67): "they may have to work in any discipline of the department for which they were hired to work".

Regarding the lack of infrastructure, this is a reality present not only at UFPE, but also in other public universities in Brazil, as evidenced in studies that focused on the issue of the Substitute Professor, with reference to Koehler (2006), Rates (2015) and Silva (2016).

With regard to the contributions of working conditions at UFPE, Chart 5 brings together aspects presented by the participants.

Chart 5 - Contributions of working conditions at UFPE to work as a Substitute Professor

Emerging categories	Percentage
Welcoming and academic support	26%
Infrastructure/Schedule/Disciplines assumed	16%
Academic freedom	8%
Experience	2%
Quality of students	2%
Other	46%

Source: The authors.

Welcoming and academic support were the contribution with the highest percentage (26%), according to the following statements:

I was supported all the time by teachers and staff. The work environment was as liberal and calm as possible. (11CAC)

Despite not having a good structure, the university staff provided technical support as much as possible. (23CAA)

Encouragement and support from the undergraduate coordination (07CCEN)

Very friendly students and helpful colleagues (07CCS)

Socializing with fellow substitute teachers and also with my former teachers who always supported me in everything. (33CE)

The set of these testimonies reveals that the participants point out as a positive contribution to the performance the coexistence with the faculty/student and technical-administrative body during the bond as a Substitute Professor.

## ELEMENTS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROCESS OF BUILDING THE TEACHING PROFESSIONALISM OF PROFESSIONALS WHO WORKED AS SUBSTITUTE PROFESSORS AT UFPE

Although we consider the precarious working conditions imposed on the Substitute Teacher, we believe that it is necessary to go further in order to also make known contributions to the construction of teaching professionalism.

In this sense, this study sought to collect data on contributions to the performance as a Substitute Teacher, and the results are shown in Chart 6 below.

Chart 6 - What contributed to the performance as a Substitute Professor at UFPE

Emerging categories	Percentage
Experience in the market of the specific field and/or teaching experience (in Higher Education and/or Basic Education)	22%
Education (undergraduate and postgraduate)	14%
Relationship, welcoming, support from effective teachers, substitute colleagues, students, etc.	9%
Like/interest in teaching, ease of communication, vocation	8%
Academic activities (Teaching Internship, Monitoring, Scientific Initiation, Internships)	6%
Other	41%

Source: The authors.

The Table above reveals the professional experience in the specific field and in some cases in teaching in Basic Education (EB) or even in Higher Education (HE) as a contribution to the performance. With regard to experience in the specific field, this still appears as a strong element for teaching performance. In this regard, Behrens (2003, p. 57) states that in teaching in ES we have "professionals who work in the specific labor market and dedicate themselves to teaching a few hours a week [...] The highlight of the contribution is based exactly on the preciousness of experiences lived in its area of expertise". The testimonies below illustrate this order of events.

My professional experience, my activities and Design methodologies. (17CAA)

External professional experience. (05 CCSA)

The experience in the delivery room as a nurse in the sector and the experience of the residency in Women's Health. (29CCS)

Experience in a technical role at the State Department of Education. (16CE)

Experience as a teacher previously and as a sanitarian in the public management of the SUS. (30CCS)

These testimonies confirm that experience in the specific professional field constitutes a contribution to the teaching practice. In addition to this professional experience, teaching experience in Higher Education or Basic Education was also pointed out as a contribution, in some cases combined with experience in the specific field.

Previous experiences as a teacher, care experience and knowledge of the university's structure. (21 CAV)

I already had experience as a teacher at EF and 04 years of experience in higher education but in a private institution. (07CE)

Previous experience as a teacher, both in basic education and in private higher education. (08CFCH)

My experience at the basic level and the academic research itself. (16CAC)

The set of these testimonies reveals a recurrence of previous teaching experiences, whether in Basic Education or Higher Education, as well as an articulation with experiences in the specific field as a contribution to action.

Academic training (undergraduate and postgraduate) was the second element pointed out as a contribution to work as a HCP, as shown in the following statements.

The master's course in Education that I attended at CAA itself. (13CAA)

The doctoral disciplines gave me theoretical support. (09CAV)

My master's degree course was fundamental to my work. (19CCS)

To carry out an excellent Graduation. (37CE)

The contribution related to academic training (undergraduate and postgraduate) was common to most of the participants, especially the contribution of graduate studies, in this case, ratifying the idea of *stricto sensu* graduate studies as a privileged space for training in Higher Education, namely under the terms of the legislation when it defines that "the preparation for the exercise of higher education will be done at the graduate level, primarily in master's and doctoral programs" (BRASIL, 1996).

In this regard, Masetto (2015, p. 15) draws attention to the fact that until the 1970s "candidates for higher education were practically required to have a bachelor's degree and the competent exercise of the profession [...] Currently, master's and doctoral degrees are required."

Also in the context of training as a contribution to teaching, some participants mentioned graduate training related to other experiences, as shown in the following statements:

My professional practice in collective health and graduate training with high-level professors in collective health from the best public health university in the world. (02CCS)

Education and professional experience. (26CCSA)

The great academic training I experienced at the time and my professional experience as a teacher in the state. (02CE)

In addition to the master's course, the opportunity to have carried out a teaching internship with the medical course at UFPE. (18CAV).

The above statements show the relevance of training articulated with professional experience. The statement about the teaching internship illustrates the warning of Pimenta and Anastasiou (2002, p. 106): "this initiative puts into discussion the importance of the necessary preparation for the professional for the exercise of teaching, so that he is not left to his own fate".

The relationship, reception and support of permanent teachers, substitutes, students, technicians and managers, was also a contribution mentioned by participants.

The experiences with the other teachers and with the students themselves. (94 CCS)

Reception of students. Having already had experience as a professor in undergraduate and graduate studies. (14CAV)

The reception of the most experienced professors in the department (graphic expression), who carried out a training program for substitutes at the time (24 CAC)

There are many partnerships. Among students, other fellow professors, departments. (30CE)

The above statements are in line with what is explained in the literature on substitute teachers, in relation to the lack of acceptance, the negative relationship with permanent teachers in the context of what is pointed out by Rates (2015, p. 111) as a "difficulty in the relationship between substitute and permanent teachers, perceived in the scarcity of partnerships".

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In summary, the findings of our research revealed: the predominance of a conception of teaching in the university with the function of training professionals and citizens; the acquisition of teaching experience as the main motivation to act as a Substitute Professor; the experience as a professional in the specific field as well as the teaching experience as a contribution to the performance; the working conditions, although pointed out as negative (limits), were also considered positive, as a contribution to action. And they revealed, among others, that the elements that contributed to the process of building the teaching professionalism of professionals linked as Substitute Professor at UFPE were, for the most part: the search for professional experience; the professional/teaching experience; the relationship (welcoming/support), academic training (undergraduate and graduate) and academic activities (Teaching Internship, Monitoring, Scientific Initiation, Internships). The study, in addition to corroborating what is found in the literature on Substitute Teachers, especially about the precarious conditions related to the contract as a substitute, points to the importance of recognizing the experience in this context as a space for teacher professionalization.

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