Identifying, Describing, and Developing Teachers Who Are Gifted and Talented

Meta L. Van Sickle
College of Charleston, USA

Julie D. Swanson
College of Charleston, USA

Judith A. Bazler
Monmouth University, USA

Kathryn L. Lubniewski
Monmouth University, USA

IGI Global
DISSEMINATOR OF KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 20
GATE Teachers From the Inside Out:
Students' Perceptions on Gifted and Talented Teachers in the Classroom

Rosalina Pisco Costa
Universidade de Évora, Portugal

Adriana Dias de Oliveira
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo, Brazil

ABSTRACT

This chapter departs from the crisis of education to explore the students' perceptions about the teacher within the classroom. Based on a sociological qualitative study developed with both students and teachers at secondary public schools in Brazil and Portugal, four categories of teachers were characterized: authoritarian, bureaucratic, accomplice, and the democratic teacher. An in-depth analysis of data sheds new light on the definition of giftedness and talent among teachers, as the category of teachers here designated as "democratic" seems to be characterized by the teachers' ability and talent in balancing the two main axes of school education: transmission and socialization. Relations between respect, gift, and talent are further explored, proving to be of the utmost importance in the classroom, insofar as gifted and talented (GATE) teachers are perceived as those who, based on responsibility for the educational act, manage to establish a pedagogical contract based on mutual respect.

INTRODUCTION

In the last decades, we have witnessed a crisis of education, with direct and profound relation to the numerous and broad transformations that education, and especially school education, have undergone since the advent of modernity (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994).

Portugal and Brazil are no exception in such a scenario, specifically with the political democratization processes faced in the 1970s and 1980s respectively (UNESCO, 2010; Correia, 2007). In these countries, the political change resulting from the end of an enduring and penetrating dictatorship period led to equally strong changes at the economic, social and cultural level. New demands arose with the plurality of voices that the social movements introduced in the new political arena. In the educational field, the generalization of entry into school for all individuals, not only the wealthy or the ruling class, was striking. Such right was conceived as a fundamental instrument for the achievement of the newly won political and civil rights and as an essential factor for both the economic and social development.

It is true that the discussion about the universalization of school access was already present in both cited countries at the beginning of the 20th century, yet as Sebastião and Correia (2007) claim, such discussion was based on distinct and sometimes contradictory proposals. Early conceptualization around the universalization of school access was based upon the perception that getting into school was a major instrument to instill moral and political grounds. At the same time, as the New-School adherents believed, the school was the key space for students to develop their autonomy and skills. Both orientations agreed that an equal opportunity in accessing school and education should be guaranteed by the state.

In Portugal, after 1974, and in Brazil, in the 1980s, the universalization of the right to education became a social reality and not simply words in the constitutional texts. In both countries, democracy is inseparable from the entry of the majority of school-age children into basic education, a situation that progressively was internalized in society as an acquired right.

Despite the undeniable progress, according to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2010), there are still many young people in Brazil who are away from school either because they never attended or because they dropped out. Moreover, a significant proportion of people do not go beyond basic education, pointing to challenges to be faced. As for Portugal, the 2017 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Report points to similar challenges where retention and dropout rates are considerably higher than the OECD average.

As access to school is assured, the debate about formal education acquires a new scope, focusing on the consequences of schooling's achievement and the effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) of equality of opportunities. As a consequence, questions develop concerning the quality of the education offered, the content to be taught and how to teach that content. Fresh social demands arise, namely an increasing demand for a greater participation of the student in the teaching and learning process.

The introduction of psychological attributes, mainly from Piagetian influence, contributed to this shift in education, namely the decentralization from the teacher figure to student-centered pedagogy. Because skills and competencies related to individual characteristics become part of the school's concerns, the teachers as agents of education have to consider such factors when facing everyday problems within the classroom, specifically differences in learning rhythms and learning differences' influence in discipline and conflict management.

In this new context, the experience, disciplinary knowledge, and emphasis upon the content to be passed onto students by the teachers as the custodians is progressively replaced by fresh competences that the teachers must master in order to carry out activities to enhance or strengthen the students' natural abilities. The educational emphasis is modified from the teaching process - centered on the content and personified in the teacher - into the learning process - focused upon the construction of the student's experience - in which the teacher's role is to motivate the student to learn.

New knowledge coming from psychology about the phases of human development assists in the management of the diversity that composes today's classroom. While defining the stages of development, school psychology distinguishes between what should be designated as normality and abnormality and can, therefore, be used as a justification for mechanisms of school exclusion (Patto, 1984).

This Copernican revolution, caused by the adoption of Piagetian concepts, led to an emptiness of the image of the teacher forcing the reconfiguration of its role in the educational process (Esteve, 1999; Gandin & Lima, 2015), either by prioritizing the demands and individual characteristics of the students whom the school needs to attend or through emphasizing the predominance and intervention of psychology in the pedagogical processes. In one way or another, the participation of teachers in educational action is displaced and their importance in educational decisions diminished. As a consequence, teachers may no longer recognize themselves as responsible for the act of educating. However, it is necessary to consider that this possible disengagement of teachers from education is in opposition to what Arendt (2003) claims to be quite essential in the educational act itself: the responsibility of the adults by their acts. As such, the teacher should share the historically constructed contents with the upcoming generations while welcoming and integrating the new thinking they bring. The key is not in recovering an illusory peaceful past, but instead building a new space in the relationship between teachers and students, an "in-between place," in which knowledge can be transmitted and renewed in a way that both school actors - teachers and students - are committed to education and thus, ensure the very continuity of the world.

In order to better understand the possible paths to be taken, this chapter analyzes some characteristics of the crisis of education in the contemporary world and its relation with the new demands it imposes for the 'teaching profession.' Secondly, the text explores research results of an empirical study carried out with secondary school teachers and students around the social representations and practices of teachers. Finally, the text discusses the characteristics of talented teachers who can establish a pedagogical contract based on mutual respect. This issue is further explored in the view of moving the current crisis of education towards an effective school democratization.

It is expected that this text will help elucidate the complexity of the teachers' exercise of respect in the context of contemporary school sociability, as well as inspire other teachers to (re)construct the public school as a preferred space for the ethical encounter with the otherness. Bringing together concepts of respect, gifted and talented teachers might help the design of teacher preparation programs, especially on the secondary and higher-education levels. Gifted and talented teachers might also offer effective suggestions for future program developers or classes in teacher education.

CRISIS OF EDUCATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: LIMITS AND POSSIBILITIES OF TEACHERS

Crisis, Tradition and Authority in Liquid Times

In 1958, Hannah Arendt was a leading voice in denouncing the education crisis that plagued the world, and particularly the United States, after the advent of World War II (Arendt, 2003). For the author, it was a crisis that modernity itself would have introduced, as its basis would be related to the fall of tradition and the questioning of authority.

With modernity, aspects of traditional life have ceased to be considered as guides to human thinking, feeling and acting, because the attitudes of the past are no longer models or examples to be followed by the current generations. On the contrary, modernity has, as its motto, the freedom to construct the present apart from the ties of the past. Modern humanity, uprooted from the past, has no obstacles to build and own their destiny. In understanding todays' world, the thought of Z. Bauman is of particular interest. According to this author, one lives in liquid modernity (Bauman, 2001) - that is, in a world in which social and cultural codes are liquefied and individuals lose the references that guide action, either to follow them or to fight them. Now, individuals would be released to carry out their personal project, at their own risk.

This scenario is consistent with recent technological changes, especially with the emergence of the Internet, where information is constantly changing, as it is transmitted almost instantaneously and without border restrictions, allowing a new conception of time and space. With the advent of the cyber world, time and distance cease to be obstacles to economic, social, cultural and political flows, and it is possible to make exchanges between individuals through virtual time.

What are the consequences of such changes in the educational field? When analyzing the challenges of current schooling, Forquin (1989) refers to Arendt's thinking and demonstrates how important it is to understand the impasses faced by teachers in their professional daily life. According to this author, every education is conservative. This statement means that as education passes the culture historically constructed by humanity, it is intended concomitantly to socialize and train the new generations as it introduces these generations into the old world while sharing the knowledge already realized.

This function within schooling in spreading knowledge that has permanence in time, leaving marks beyond the generation in which it was produced, and that have legitimacy both by the teachers who will teach it and by those to whom they are addressed, is the foundation of authority. In this sense, authority and tradition are aspects intrinsically linked to education yet not valued in the contemporary society, which is one of the crucial points of its crisis. Forquin (1989) adds[1]:

There is a kind of structural incompatibility between the spirit of modernity and the justification of education as tradition and cultural transmission. Hannah Arendt formulates such a contradiction in particularly strong terms when she observes that education, which by its nature supposes authority and tradition, must be exercised today in a world which is no longer structured by authority or contained by tradition (p. 20).

As for authority, according to Sennett (2001) it can be legitimate or illegitimate. The second type, illegitimate authority, is related to indifference or authoritarianism. Legitimate authority, on the other hand, is based on guidelines promoting social bonds between unequal individuals. Legitimate authority recognizes the difference in the positions of the actors involved in the relationship. At the same time, it understands that these are not necessarily hierarchical guidelines and they may take diffuse forms with aspects more in keeping with the current historical moment of liquidity.

The support of legitimate authority lies in the relation it maintains with the other and not because it is written into the law, sustained by the charisma, or based on tradition as Weber (1978) mentioned. Authority is more than advice and less than coercion, a place of frontier; it is not an imposition or threat to the freedom of the individual yet is fundamental in the development of the necessary discernment for the construction of autonomy as an ideal of freedom (Freire, 2000).

As mentioned before, regarding the relationship between teachers and students as an "in-between place," this relationship is what the teaching authority is about: helping the student in the construction of an autonomous citizenship or, in other words, being responsible for the insertion of the individual in the world of culture and, at the same time, ensuring that it is appropriated and can be reformulated by him/her if desired. For this, the teacher's speech must be perceived as meaningful, as someone who deserves the respect of being listened to because the teacher is a symbolic reference that goes beyond individual interests and is related to the common good.

TEACHING AUTHORITY TODAY

Against this backdrop, what is the basis of teaching authority in the contemporary world? According to Arendt (2003), this teaching authority is essential for the educational process to take place. In this context, how does one configure it in the framework of the liquid world we live in where changes in the various social, political, cultural and educational arenas are exponential? Additionally, as the universalization of school access and process of school psychologizing previously discussed change the curriculum and the disciplinary knowledge, both impact and lessen the teacher's authority.

In the liquid society (Bauman, 2001), evidence of this reality is seen in the recent changes to the curricula. Disciplinary knowledge is reformulated and much of what the teacher learned in the past is no longer current. For example, there are a variety of guidelines for understanding scientific problems and the possibilities for solving them are also manifold. Added to this complexity in capturing the integrity of a phenomenon are the social demands for the inclusion of new knowledge previously excluded as well as the need to integrate content with the student's daily life. These factors contribute to the disorientation of teachers and impose fresh and constant challenges.

In such a context, the teacher is no longer represented as being the 'holder of knowledge' and his or her exposition in the classroom can be confronted with other sources of information that the students have access to--among them, and mainly, the Internet. Bauman (2001) advocates that the valorization of the space and present time that the Internet propagates challenges another important aspect of education: education is a promise to be realized in the future - the effort of the now to achieve a better life later, be it cultural, social or economic. The insinuation of education that dedication and waiting are necessary to achieve success afterwards seems to be contradictory with the idea of "instantaneous" and "non-substantive time" (Bauman, 2001). Instantaneity means immediate realization, and, at the same time, "exhaustion" and "disappearance of interest" (Bauman, 2001).

Facing the absence of sustainable references, the teacher sees himself/herself alone to build his/her own professional work and know-how. Often lost and insecure, the teacher questions what to teach, how to teach, and why to teach. In this context of strong fluidity and indeterminacy of the present time, and in the face of the growing bereavement of authority that traditionally fits him/her, there is a risk that the teacher will have uncompromised himself/herself by the act of teaching.

Nonetheless, the role within the school is increasingly important, as one of the requirements of this society in constant transformation is continuous training. The teacher needs to be constantly updated, to ensure a better teaching environment for the students. It is up to him/her not only to master the curricular knowledge he/she teaches, but also to relate it to the other contents of the field, as well as with the events that occur throughout the world.

Therefore, broader issues arise regarding the re-composition of the teachers' responsibility under the act of educating and not of recovering the past, supposedly composed by happier times. In this new context, teachers are invited not to conform to the current scenario, but rather to assume an in-between condition of being both the teacher and the professional, which the teaching function requires.

In this sense, permanent training refers to training of the individual as a subject of his/her time and endowed with the potential to reflect critically on it. It is, therefore, important to perceive continuous training, not only as an external demand of the society, imposed on the teacher, but also as a necessity of the teacher to analyze and reflect upon his/her place within the world. Nóvoa (1995) suggests,

Being in training implies a personal investment, a free and creative work on the paths and the projects, with a view to the construction of an identity, which is also a professional identity [...]. Training is not built by accumulation (of courses, knowledge or techniques), rather by reflective work on criticism and the permanent construction of a personal identity. That is why it is so important to invest in the person and to give a status to the knowledge of experience (p.25).

In such a process, the teacher can find in continuous training an unparalleled moment to unveil and reinvent the work in education, to articulate knowledge and practices built throughout his/her professional career while also sharing with peers' life experiences to provide possible paths to be followed collectively in facing the challenges that daily school presents. Without further requirements, this training can happen in the classroom - for example, in the inquiry-based environment where both teachers and students are at the same time experts and novices. These considerations lead the teachers' training to have as the main purpose, not the instrumentalization of teachers for the applicability of techniques and theories developed by agents from other instances, but rather the reflection and critical elaboration of the teacher making, returning the teaching commitment for the act of educating. Summing up, the current crisis of education should be a driver to analyze the educational process in school and to rethink pedagogical practices and knowledge, seeking innovative ways of teaching and relating with students.

With the purpose of looking for clues that help to unveil the paths to be followed in facing the current crisis of education, while seeking new possibilities for teachers to perform in such a path, an empirical study was carried out as described in the pages that follow.

METHODOLOGICAL NOTES

Aiming to study students' social representations of teaching characteristics and practices, a qualitative empirical study was carried out in two public schools in the cities of Lisbon (Portugal) and São Paulo (Brazil). The schools were purposely chosen as they had similar socioeconomic indicators, that is to say, both had good infrastructure conditions and a varied supply of public transport, as well as a wooded area nearby. In addition, these schools are exclusively composed of young students (15-17 years old), which enabled for a more reliable reading of data, namely around questions such as how the relationship between teachers and students in is the first year of high school or regarding several other limited subjects about the research. The choice for this specific level of education is justified by having great school challenges to be faced by the two countries involved, such as school dropout and failure. Because the research was not specifically oriented to study GATE teachers, none of the teachers involved were previously identified as gifted and talented.

The selected schools were treated differently in terms of methodological procedures, although complementary, in view of the triangulation of information (Patton, 2002). First, exploratory research was conducted within the Lisbon school. There, three teachers (two men and one woman), all white and with different disciplinary backgrounds (human, sciences and languages) and five students (two boys and three girls, one being an immigrant) were interviewed. In addition to the individual interviews, participatory observation was carried out, consisting of the accompaniment of the teachers in the classroom and of the students on the playground.

Second, in the school at São Paulo, a more intensive research design was employed, benefiting from multiple methodologies: school ethnography, individual and group interviews, participatory observation and application of pedagogical scenarios. In the city of São Paulo, there were six teachers interviewed, distributed as follows: three professors of the subjects of geography/sociology, philosophy and mathematics and three professors of biology, English, and history. As for the students, the number of participants were eight, equally distributed by gender and race/ethnicity, having two black students referred in each gender[2].

Although the relevance of considering gender, class and race/ethnicity in the analysis of education studies (Apple, 1988), these variables will not be explored throughout this study[3]. All the teachers interviewed were effective at school, yet with different seniority in the profession. In the same way, the sample was homogenized as far as the age of the students is concerned (14 and 15 years old), and none of them had repeated or left the school previously.

The method of content analysis proposed by Bardin (1977) was used to understand the speech of the social actors surveyed. From a qualitative perspective, the analysis first looked for similarities and differences in the representations given by both students and teachers of the same school. After that, subjects were grouped and a deeper analysis was undertaken into the narratives provided by students and teachers with different nationalities. Transversally, the key-objective was to look for "obscure messages," as pointed by Bardin (1977):

Obscure messages that require an interpretation, messages with a double meaning whose deep significance can only arise after a careful observation or charismatic intuition. Behind the apparent discourse, which is usually symbolic and polysemous, there is a meaning to be unveiled (p. 16).

In view of the above and taking into account that all human experience is mediated by the interpretation and attribution of meanings given to the experience, the text now advances in the analysis and discussion of empirical results from the research. In this endeavor, the authors explored the virtues of the qualitative writing (Costa, 2013) for understanding the transformations of the school in the contemporary world. Specifically, they looked at what the individuals attending the school perceive to be a "quality education," its content and how it is taught; the relation between teachers and students; as well as the growing demand for a greater participation of those actors in the teaching and learning process. Of all these aspects, the section that follows focuses mainly on the students' social representations of teacher characteristics and talented teaching practices.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS AND TEACHING PRACTICES

The analysis on the data collected, whether registered in field notes, in the recordings of the interviews and corresponding transcripts, in the fulfillment of the pedagogical scenarios, or in the informal conversations carried out in classrooms, in the teachers' offices, corridors or in the playground, led us to the identification of four categories of teachers, differentiated according to the two main axes of school education: content transmission and students' socialization. The process of developing such categories relies on an inductive analysis strongly inspired by the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) on grounded theory and follows the strategies and procedures described across the qualitative research literature (Bardin, 1977; Patton, 2002). In this context, the results from the research that follow rest on the perception of the subjects of the research about teaching and how this enables (or not) the formation of educational links, capable of involving teachers and students in the teaching-learning process.

This section now advances with the detailed and informed presentation of four categories of teachers: the "Authoritarian Teacher," the "Bureaucratic Teacher," the "Accomplice Teacher" and the "Democratic Teacher." The aim of presenting these categories independently is to help the reader to understand differences pointed out by the subjects of the research regarding teachers' characteristics and teaching practices. Finally, note that the terminology used in the denomination of the categories was not defined *a-priori*. Instead, it was formed inductively by the researcher throughout the research as a result of both the literature review, data analysis and, in some cases, *in-vivo* expressions narrated by the individuals who often used those words or similar variations of them in their own discourses while being interviewed.

The Authoritarian Teacher (C1)

Based on the assumption of Arendt (2003) that every education has as a function to initiate young people around the world of culture (transmission) and, concurrently, to share with them the common world (socialization), the first category of teachers includes those who reveal as one of its main concerns the transmission of disciplinary contents with little attention to the socializing aspect.

The teacher included under this category is involved with growing the student's content-forming process, as the expert in the scientific domain of the subject that teaches, plans and explains. In relation to socialization, this teacher is a rigorous disciplinarian, trying to maintain the "control over the class," not allowing "distractions" nor "parallel" conversations.

When two students talk during an explanation, the authoritarian teacher evaluates this event as an affront to his/her person; he reacts with violence and plays the victim. In this way, the authoritarian teacher reprimands the student aggressively, whether in the tone of voice, in what he says or how he addresses the students.

These are some of the expressions used to describe such professors, emerging through the students' narratives:

Sometimes we talk about the class, but he wants a morbid silence. (student, Portugal)

One cannot stay quiet all the time. Completely stop. So, we talk or sleep. (student, Brazil).

Below, some of the expressions unveil the ways teachers in this category talk and reflect about themselves and their relation to students:

Why are you talking if I did not give you permission? If you do not lift your finger, I will not answer! (teacher, Portugal)

Read what I said and we'll see if you understand. This is not what I want. You cannot stay there, waiting until the teacher. (teacher, Portugal)

Okay, they are disinterested, but do not come in to disrupt my class. There I turn into an animal! (teacher, Brazil).

The type of school environment characterized by the authoritarian teacher is anchored in a traditional religious or military education orientation in which the body governance and hierarchical relationship are important. This category brings us to Foucault's disciplinary society and the concepts of bio power and governability (Foucault, 1975), according to which the body and life are instruments to be disciplined in the service of sovereign power. As Foucault (1975) asserts:

[…] integrated within the interior of a single device, there are three procedures: teaching itself, the acquisition of knowledge by the exercise of the pedagogical activity itself, finally a mutual and hierarchical observation. A defined and regulated control relationship is embedded in teaching practice: not as a brought or adjacent piece, but as an inherent mechanism and multiplies its efficiency (p. 148).

Thus, because of the strong professional background and responsibility associated with educating, the authoritarian teacher ends up being considered the "holder of knowledge" and the students as "receptacles of his/her knowledge," resulting in difficulties accepting the demands from the students and having little interaction with them in the process of knowledge construction. Following a conflict episode in the classroom, one of the interviewed teachers says:

Students need to take advantage of the opportunities I give them and their own capabilities. It was this reason that led me to give a reprimand to the class. (teacher, Portugal)

This notion of conformity and control found in disciplinary societies (Deleuze, 1992) may face movements of repudiation and refusal. These movements may be met with the use of instruments of coercion, thus feeding circles of violence in which fear and punishment prevail rather than the recognition of competencies.

The Bureaucratic Teacher (C2)

The second category of teachers analyzed is designated as the bureaucratic teacher. These types of teachers are characterized by their non-involvement with the educational process, either with the transmission of content or with the socialization of and with the students.

These teachers, similarly to the previous, have mastery in their area of knowledge and plan the classes so as to minister. However, their concern is not necessarily to transmit the content, but to assure the employment aspects of their profession. Further, they do not get involved in the human relationships within the school, either with students or peers.

As for the relationship with students, teachers included in this category state:

[I] do not get involved, because the students are uninterested, and they lack education, cradle. (teacher, Brazil)

I come and do my work. They have to do theirs. (teacher, Portugal)

The students' moods were very exalted. Not having affected my intervention, I let it go. (teacher, Portugal)

Students also perceive that they have no ties to the bureaucratic teacher and resent this fact:

She enters the class and does not even greet. Already talking about the topics and does not care about us. (student, Brazil)

Once, he said in class that he would earn the same if we learned it or not, and that he would not care. It seems that he is more concerned with himself than with us. (two students, Portugal)

Thus, bureaucratic teachers follow their planning to the letter, regardless of whether the student learns or not because what is important is "keeping up with the topics." This teacher is also disciplined about the times of entry and exit and other formal commitments that their position demands. On the other hand, this type of educator knows and seeks to benefit from the rules that are guaranteed by law, such as licenses, prizes, bonuses, etc. This teacher's action, limited to compulsory and operational tasks, seems to have no commitment to education. This teacher is perceived as a public servant in the narrow sense of the term, that is, as an official of the State and possessing rights that give him/her stability of employment, not as having a duty to serve the collective interest of society in order to preserve the common good as it corresponds to the post of civil servant.

Disappointed and disillusioned by multiple factors, seeing him/herself without support in the school and community, the bureaucratic teacher, who could also be called an apathetic teacher, perceives him/herself alone, lacking social recognition, having the latent characteristics of teacher malaise (Esteve, 1999). As this author points out:

The social status of the teacher has changed […] At the present time, our society tends to establish social status based on the level of wage income. The idea of knowing, self-denial and vocation, fell upon the ground in valorization. For many parents, someone who has chosen to be a teacher is not associated in the sense of a vocation, but with the alibi of his inability to do "something better"; that is, to devote oneself to something else that allows earning more money (Esteve, 1999, p. 34).

Concurrent ideas around the figure of the bureaucratic teacher can be found in both the students and the teachers' speeches:

They do not want to know anything. They only stay in the Face, talking, (teacher, Brazil)

There's nothing new, every class is the same. Then the students misbehave, do not let him talk ... One does not motivate the other to be here (student, Brazil)

It used to be different. The students wanted to learn. Not anymore. (teacher, Portugal)

What makes me boil is his apathy. (student, Portugal)

The Accomplice Teacher (C3)

It should be noted that this category of teachers was not found in the school studied in Lisbon, although its existence is evident among the teachers of the school in the city of São Paulo. One can characterize this category as including condescending teachers, who do not care about maintaining discipline or even care during the absence of discipline, as observed by the teachers previously analyzed. Below, there is more detail on the self-perception of such teachers:

I do not think there should be a difference between teacher and students. We are both here to learn. (teacher, Brazil)

I was young, too. So, I know this mess in the room is normal. (teacher, Brazil)

The accomplice teacher values human relations at the expense of content transmission. As educators, they tend to minimize the hierarchy between teacher and students, encouraging participation in the class and seeking to bring the matter closer to the social reality of the students, so that they can give or recognize meaning to it.

By adopting the psychologizing discourse of education, the teacher conceives the students as the protagonists of learning, who must have an active participation in the class. Special attention should also be given on the content transmitted to students, in order to stimulate them to learn. Students somehow recognize those characteristics as being positive in the teaching-learning process:

He always lets us talk. To give our opinion, and this is cool! (student, Brazil)

He talks about things from day to day, and then I understand. (student, Brazil)

The classes of the accomplice teacher require little planning, sometimes are based on improvisation, but a lot of "jogo de cintura," although difficult to translate means, a lot of flexibility and creativity, because the important thing is to maintain the good relationship between the students, who as this teacher, feel the victim of the abandonment of the State. Thus, the accomplice teacher seeks to form affective bonds with the students, in order to advise or guide them for "*today the youth is without references, lost. It is our job to help them find a way*" (teacher, Brazil). Another teacher points that "*Sometimes I play the role of mother, friend, psychologist ... some even forget that I am a teacher*" (teacher, Brazil).

A further aspect mentioned by the accomplice teacher justifying his/her priority in the socialization of the students is the fact that "*nowadays they* [the students] *learn through channels other than school*" (teacher, Brazil). Consequently, in order to ensure cordiality and "*having no problems in the classroom,*" the teacher negotiates and engages into agreements touching permissiveness.

There are days when they are agitated and there is no classroom. So, I'll be there, talking to them. (teacher, Brazil)

This teacher is not willing to retrain to develop new skills and competencies, rather he/she seeks to make classes attractive by using technologies, images, and sound. Such strategies are not always perceived as good by students in the classroom:

Sometimes I think he exaggerates. Only has a film. (student, Brazil)

We realize when the teacher wants to tease us and show music, data. (student, Brazil)

Therefore, in spite of having a friendlier relationship with the students than the previous teachers, this situation of squatting can make the accomplice teacher a "pal" and the specific role of teaching historically installed knowledge can be suspended. In this way, similar to the bureaucratic teacher, the accomplice teacher ends up not taking responsibility for the act of educating. This context might create ambivalent feelings experienced by the interviewed students:

I like him. He's fun, and I know he likes us. But I do not always think I learned something in class, you know? (student, Brazil)

The Democratic Teacher (C4)

Among the analyzed categories, this category is the only one where the teacher appears to successfully balance both the transmission of contents and the socialization of students. Teachers included under this category perceive students as a constitutive part of the educational process, true subjects of learning. Students are perceived as co-authors of the educational process, in which teachers and students have distinct, but interdependent roles.

On the one hand, the democratic teacher is concerned with dissemination of historically constructed knowledge, as in the first category of teachers (C1), yet without the imposition and authoritarianism. On the other hand, there is the discernment of the relevance of forming and maintaining friendly relations with the students. Both students and teachers summarize this category as follows:

We realize that she's compromised. She is attentive to what we speak, but she does not lose her ground. (student, Portugal)

They [the students] also have to participate and contribute to the class. I think I should encourage them to do it. (teacher, Brazil)

I believe that I could motivate them, to encourage participation, to give them attention without others feeling excluded. (teacher, Portugal)

It's not easier [to take the class with that teacher]. Nevertheless, it gives more pleasure. (student, Portugal)

The knowledge gained by students in contexts out of school, such as through family socialization, peer groups and the media they access, are conceived by this teacher as aggregators, and although this other knowledge sometimes conflicts with what is being explained by the teacher, he/she seeks to demystify events and stimulate critical thinking so that students can go beyond what is already known. Both teachers and students recognize this aspect:

The students have knowledge. They come to school with experience and the teacher who does not consider this fact is doomed to failure. (teacher, Portugal)

Listening to the student is important. We know things. Not like him [the teacher], but we know. (student, Brazil)

From this perspective, as shown below, the parallel conversations in the classroom are negotiated with the students, so that the teacher can carry out his work, but without the intense control over the students' bodies, as within the authoritarian teacher (C1).

It's no use if the teacher wants to talk a lot. It's better when he lets the student talk about his experience, to interact. (student, Portugal)

Sometimes, all we [the students] want to do is to talk, and then he [the teacher] asks for some time and explains that it can't be like that. (student, Brazil)

Moreover, in this category of teachers, there is no tendency to abandon their responsibility to teach as there is with the bureaucratic (C2) and the accomplice teacher (C3), insofar as democratic teachers seek to convince students of the relevance of what they are teaching. The authoritarian teacher (C1) also tries to do this, yet the democratic teacher utilizes other means, seeking to stimulate the students' participation in class. The democratic teacher seeks to maintain "*a certain strategic detachment from the student: neither being in the pedestal of old times, nor being his/her friend*" (teacher, Brazil). Similar ideas emerge from other speeches of both the students and teachers:

Look, I do this: I see what they bring on the subject, and I develop my class from there. It is the starting point to get where I need to teach. (teacher, Brazil)

Teacher has to teach. He/she is not a friend to the student. However, he/she can talk and try to understand how we think. The class gets more excited and makes you want to come. (student, Portugal)

We realize that she likes to teach. She wants the student to learn. This helps to learn. (student, Portugal)

It all changed. Students changed, and teachers changed. Being in constant change is a sign of life. (teacher, Portugal)

Furthermore, in relation to their peers, the attitude of the democratic teacher is differentiated. As he or she does with the students, he or she seeks to find among his or her colleagues in the profession possible points of interest, which can help building collective identity bonds. The following excerpts from the teachers' interviews, afterward grouped under this category, show this way of relating with peers:

There are always those who do not just complain and want to do something. It is with these that I try to be. (teacher, Brazil)

We have a group of colleagues who can help each other. That's good, it relieves. (teacher, Portugal)

We have new colleagues who are committed. Well formed, very dedicated. (teacher, Portugal)

As far as the external community or even the general society is concerned, teachers included under this category recognize themselves as devalued, often without the support of the family and the State. However, he or she is not in an apathetic and victimizing stance as the second and third category of teachers, respectively bureaucratic (C2) and accomplice (C3). On the contrary, as with the authoritarian teacher (C1), the democratic teacher is strongly committed to impart knowledge:

There are colleagues who are there whining. I don´t. I am looking forward to seeing how I can improve. (teacher, Portugal)

There's a lot wrong. Today, everything falls on the teacher's back. Not really. I try to give my best to these kids; I know I can cause a change into the lives of some of them. (teacher, Brazil)

Similarly, to the accomplice teacher (C3), the democratic teacher is suspicious of the professional future. Nonetheless, the democratic teacher is different from the accomplice teacher, as the democratic teacher seeks to update him/herself in the respective disciplinary and other areas (e.g. learning new technology to use in class as a way to address social changes that impact the school institution). As stated by some of these teachers:

This is the future. I will learn how to explore it [social networks] in class. (teacher, Portugal)

We are in an image society. So, you cannot read the paper or just use the blackboard in the classroom. It's boring. Even for me. (teacher, Brazil)

Still regarding teaching in relation with the outside world, some teachers from São Paulo mentioned the social role that the public school has "*to face everything that is out there and to do something new. A better, a fairer society*" (teacher, Brazil). Concomitantly, another teacher reported:

"Here [public school] we have autonomy. You can teach as you want. There [private school] we are watched and have to talk as it is in the booklet." (teacher, Brazil)

Summing up, as far as the democratic teacher is concerned, there is a strong involvement with the transmission of content, exercising actions based on solid training, and taking responsibility for teaching. On the other hand, this teacher tries to form cooperative ties with the students, seeking in this way, to transmit, but also to welcome new knowledge. This teacher recognizes the structural changes that are taking place in society, and the many challenges those changes bring to school. However, and despite the difficulties that every crisis presents, the democratic teacher has the willingness to carry out a collaborative teaching act to overcome that crisis. As Nóvoa (2009) puts it:

When a new concept, a disposal, arises, I want to break with a debate about the competences, which seems saturated to me. I adopt a more "liquid" and less "solid" concept, which I intend to look preferentially for the connection between personal and professional dimensions in the teachers' identity production. (p. 23)

According to a teacher's words:

It's a permanent construction. You are never sure that everything will happen well in class. So, you have to be attentive, renew yourself. That is challenging! (teacher, Brazil)

CONCLUSION: THE TALENTED TEACHER AND MUTUAL RESPECT

As the discourse around the school crisis grows, concerns for teacher training come to the fore. Never, as today, were preparation and specific abilities combined with motivation and talent considered key to successful programs across all education levels.

This work sought to analyze the specifics of the education crisis in contemporary times, and how it is perceived by students and teachers of two secondary public schools, in São Paulo (Brazil) and Lisbon (Portugal). Despite having distinct historical contexts, both countries face an urgent educational challenge in secondary education, the challenge of ensuring a quality school for young students in order to cope with high drop-out and retention rates.

The empirical research in this chapter is part of a larger and more complex study in which, through a qualitative research, researchers sought to understand the social representations of secondary school teachers and students on the different scopes of transformation across the school education in the countries covered. Specifically, this text focused on the perception that both teachers and students had about teaching authority and mutual respect in educational relations.

Deep analysis of the data collected in the two countries considered both its specific historical context and the revised literature. Data analysis led to the conclusion that there are many ways of understanding how the role of the teacher is perceived, either by the students or by the teachers. The qualitative-oriented analysis carried out for this study leads us to identify four different categories of teachers. The four categories are anchored in the research subjects themselves, and their perception they have about the transmission of knowledge and/or the socialization of students within the educational process: the authoritarian teacher, the bureaucratic teacher, the accomplice teacher, and the democratic teacher.

Among the four categories, the category designated as "democratic teachers" (C4), is the category that presented characteristics closest to what one could call a "talented" or "gifted teacher," insofar as it includes those teachers who can maintain a dynamic balance between the two main axes of education

(transmission and socialization). In short, according to the research subjects, the chief characteristics that define the category of teachers designated as democratic are the solid academic background, the investment in the professional development, the friendly relation that they maintain with the students and, above all, the responsibility that they have for the act of educating. Regarding training, the teachers in this category show a consistent disciplinary knowledge as well as high interest in improving that knowledge, through many different and complementary activities at their disposal, such as watching movies, reading and other less costly means. Seeking low cost training and learning opportunities happens because those teachers realize that there is a low social regard for teaching as a profession reflective of the low salaries they earn. In this sense, the democratic teacher recognizes the precariousness and proletarianization of his/her work, as analyzed by authors in the field (Nóvoa, 1995; Esteve, 1999; Enguita, 2009). However, and despite so many challenges, the subjects of the research affirmed that those classified as democratic teachers do not have a passive attitude, rather actively seek to develop professional and personal skills to face the crisis of teacher malaise.

According to the interviewees, building partnerships with other teachers, usually to develop a project or achieving a specific result from the board, also meets the major purpose of the democratic teacher engagement with the act of educating. The democratic teacher seeks among his/her peers those who are willing to make exchanges of experiences on the classes they instruct in common, or that have preceded it, in order to have prior knowledge of the class and to facilitate its administration. However, the so-called democratic teacher is aware that these agreements are provisional and difficult to maintain and can also serve as a source of prejudice against some students and reproduce social stigmas.

In relation to students, the designated democratic teacher admits that there are also points of conflict. Instead of seeking to avoid conflict, he/she undertakes to address them, as he/she recognizes that the disagreements come from a variety of sources, e.g., generational tensions and, in that sense, conflicts are a normal part of the educational process. In this particular regard, the concrete action of this category of teachers is in close relation with the Hannah Arendt's theory (Arendt, 2003). In the daily challenges, the democratic teacher tries to remember his or her youth and realize as age appropriate the adolescent features that appear as undisciplined and "disinterest" for learning. This teacher finds ways to approach youth through accessible resources. In this way, according to the interviewees, the class tends to be dialogical, with the participation of students, instigating their curiosity and encouraging work in groups or in pairs.

The class of the so-called democratic teacher does not take place in silence, but is permeated by debates, which demand the teacher to be always attentive and active, so that the class does not deviate and lose the goal that one wishes to achieve. This perception of the classroom as something dynamic and in constant construction meets Nóvoa's considerations (2009). Thus, the teacher included within the category of the democratic teachers often intervenes and reminds the students of the agreements signed for the establishment of the pedagogical contract, in which some rules and limits, such as the rights and duties of the students, but also of the teacher, have been marked. Students show a flexible and committed attitude toward the teachers included in the category of democratic teachers and recognize in the teacher a figure who deserves respect. Firstly, students respect the democratic teacher's professionalism in "giving" the content to be taught, as he/she has a solid basis, and is constantly updating in his/her knowledge. Secondly, students show respect for being respected; that is, they see in the democratic teacher the willingness to consider them as subjects of learning, without relinquishing their responsibility to teach, forming with the students a partnership that needs to be continually renewed, but in which minimum consensuses are established so that the teaching and learning process can be developed.

Of the foregoing, it follows that, according to the interviewees, the teachers included under the category designated as democratic, establish a constellation of links, and networks of partnerships, that inhibit them from isolation and professional apathy. This connection happens because the teacher recognizes in the other, in the experience and ability of his peers and students, the possibility of establishing shared educational conventions that can lead those involved towards self-reflection and citizen practice. As stated by some of the interviewees:

It's a mission. Not in the religious sense of the term. But to have commitment and respect. (teacher, Brazil).

We feel like he likes what he does and likes us. It does not seem like if it was performing any other job. (student, Portugal).

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the category of teachers, described by the subjects of the research and designated as democratic, seem to possess the ability to reconstruct the teacher's role and to affirm its importance in the teaching-learning process. This ability is especially true as those teachers strive for establishing the basis of freely argued consensus, although constantly changing. Inside of an open system, within the liquid modernity, the teacher is able to maintain with the students a shared respect, allowing alterability of time and space, creating the school as a place of formation and transformation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

REFERENCES

Apple, M. W. (1988). *Teachers and texts: A political economy of class and gender*. Hove, UK: Psychology Press.

Arendt, H. (2003). *Entre o Passado e o Futuro* [Between the past and the future]. São Paulo, Brazil: Perspectiva.

Bardin, L. (1977). *L'analyse de contenu*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

Bauman, Z. (2001). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Beck, U., Giddens, A., & Lash, S. (1994). *Reflexive modernization*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Costa, R. (2013). Ethics on the move: methodological dilemmas on the qualitative scientific writing process. In I. Paoletti, M. I. Tomás, & F. Menéndez (Eds.), *Practices of ethics: An empirical approach to ethics in social sciences research* (pp. 21–42). Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

de Oliveira, A. D. (2015). *Autoridade docente no ensino médio: compassos e descompassos no contexto contemporâneo* [Teaching authority in high school: Compasses and discomforts in the contemporary context] (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Pontifícia Universidade Católica, São Paulo, Brazil.

de Oliveira, A. D. (2016). *Verso e reverso das sociabilidades contemporâneas* [Verse and reverse of contemporary sociabilities]. Curitiba: CRV. doi:10.24824/978854441029.5

Deleuze, G. (1992). Controle e Devir [Control and Devir]. In P. P. Pelbart (Eds.), Conversações [Conversations]. São Paulo, Brazil: Editora 34.

Enguita, M. F. (2009). *Educar em tempos incertos* [To Educate in uncertain times]. Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Morata.

Esteve, J. M. (1999). Mudanças sociais e função docente. [Social changes and teaching] In *Profissão professor* [Occupation: Teacher] (pp. 95–108). Porto: Porto Editora.

Forquin, J.-C. (1989). *École et Culture. Le point de vue des sociologues britanniques*. Bruxelles: De Boeck.

Foucault, M. (1975). *Surveiller et punir*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogia da indignação: cartas pedagógicas e outros escritos* [Pedagogy of indignation: pedagogical letters and other writings]. São Paulo, Brazil: Editora UNESP.

Gandin, L. A., & Lima, I. G. (2015). Reconfiguração do trabalho docente: Um exame a partir da introdução de programas de intervenção pedagógica [Reconfiguration of the teaching work: an examination based on the introduction of pedagogical intervention programs]. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, *20*(62), 663–677. doi:10.1590/S1413-24782015206206

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Nóvoa, A. (1995). *Vidas de Professores* [Teachers lives]. Porto: Porto Editora.

Nóvoa, A. (2009). *Professores: Imagens do futuro presente* [Teachers: Images of the present future]. Lisboa: Educa.

OECD. (2017). *2017 OECD Report*. Retrieved September 12, 2017, from https://www.oecd.org/eco/surveys/Portugal-2017-OECD-economic-survey-overview-portuguese.pdf

Patto, M. H. S. (1984). *Psicologia e ideologia: uma introdução critica a psicologia escolar* [Psychology and ideology: a critical introduction to school psychology]. São Paulo, Brazil: T. A. Queiroz.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sebastião, J., & Correia, S. V. (2007). A democratização do ensino em Portugal [The democratization of education in Portugal]. In J. M. L. Viegas, H. Carreiras, & A. Malamud (Eds.), *Instituições e Política: Portugal no Contexto Europeu* [Institutions and Politics: Portugal in the European Context] (Vol. 1, pp. 107–135). Oeiras: Celta Editora.

Sennett, R. (2001). *Autoridade* [Authority]. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Record.

UNESCO. (2010). *Ensino médio e educação profissional: desafios da integração* [Secondary education and vocational education: integration challenges]. UNESCO. Retrieved August 20, 2017, from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001923/192356POR.pdf

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: an outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Democratization: It refers to the systematic and continuous effort to guarantee access and permanence of all individuals to the school, while ensuring the acquisition of public cultural assets that institutions convey in order to develop individuals who are autonomous and committed to the promotion of democratic values and actions.

Education Crisis: It must be understood as the incapacity of the school and education to play its mediating role in caring for, conserving, and transforming the world, requiring an effort of critical reflection on the educational process in order to overcome the challenges presented in the contemporary world.

Ethics: The set of moral principles that guide a person, a group, or an organizations' behavior. When applied to a specific activity, such as scientific research, ethics become the set of moral principles that guide the researcher's behavior and is intertwined with the professional deontology. Ethics always comprise values, as it determines the rightness and wrongness of certain actions, its motivations, and consequences.

Liquid Times: Is an expression used to characterize the present era, a result of the "liquid modernity," as coined by the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. It contrasts with the "solid" modernity that preceded it. The passage from a "solid" to a "liquid" modernity is anchored in the idea that social forms and institutions (e.g., family, education, work, etc.) have become weaker and fragile. In a context of permanent change and risk, old institutions no longer serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life plans. Therein, individuals have to construct themselves and to organize their lives in new and unprecedented ways.

Post-Modernity: Is the socio-cultural state or condition of a society, which is said to follow modernity. There are different understandings about the end of modernity as a socio-historical landmark. Some schools of thought hold that modernity ended soon after World War II while others pose it in the late 20th century, namely 1980s or early 1990s. The idea of the post-modern condition arises when in many social arenas (e.g., political, economy, education, environment, etc.) important events came to shake old conquers and to challenge the linear and progressive path into growth and development, as claimed by Modernism.

Qualitative Inquiry: Is a specific research design wherein data collection and data analysis techniques are combined in order to provide a deep and holistic understanding on why and how things happen rather than to provide a quantitative expression of a certain phenomenon. Data is usually obtained from a relatively small group of respondents, often through interviews or direct observation. Qualitative content analysis' techniques are used to explore and unveil the latent meanings that escape to a quantitative analysis.

Sociology: Broadly designated as the science of society. It comprises the systematic study of the development, structure, interaction, and collective behavior of organized groups of individuals, social institutions, and social relationships. Specifically, it aims to understand how society determines and shapes human behavior and how the social behavior impacts the ever-changing societies.

Teachers' Role: To be the representative of the school institution while being responsible for the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage already developed, but also for the reception of knowledge and practices that new generations introduce, thus innovating their own culture.

Teaching Authority: It is a symbolic reference that makes the word of teachers meaningful, not being a mere obedience, but the recognition of the legitimate right that the teacher has in influencing or guiding the way to be followed, since the authority granted to him surpasses individual interests and is related to the common good.

ENDNOTES

[1]   The citations of works published in a language other than English were freely translated into English by the authors.

[2]   The references to gender and race/ethnicity were self-reported by the students interviewed.

[3]   Further information on this specific topic can be consulted in other sources from the authors (Oliveira, 2015, 2016).