

“The possible within the impossible”: senses attributed by university teachers related to emergency remote education¹

“O possível dentro do impossível”:
sentidos atribuídos por professores/as universitários/as relacionados
ao ensino remoto emergencial

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to understand the senses attributed to the emergency remote education (ERE) by university teachers. The data collection used online questionnaires applied at the time when higher education institutions were discussing the implementation or experiencing the first experiences of the ERE. Using meaning core, the analysis sought to apprehend the teachers' movement in relation to the object of study, approaching the zones of sense present in the reports and revealing their determinations. It was possible to see that, at that moment, the teachers had not yet internalized ways of teaching and assess learning in the new format and, for the most part, attributed the sense of discomfort to the experience, indicating a reduction or absence of one or more conditions for the teaching and learning to be effective. The only sense of well-being found was that of caring for the collective health (his and others'). The highest volume of answers associated the ERE with the loss of references; pedagogical unpreparedness; intensification and work overload; objective conditions (social, technological or access) that are inappropriate or non-existent, especially for students; and to pedagogical (im)possibilities, describing it as a model that intensifies inequalities, that could

RESUMO

O estudo objetivou compreender os sentidos atribuídos ao ensino remoto emergencial (ERE) por professores/as universitários/as. A coleta de dados utilizou questionários online aplicados a época em que as instituições de ensino superior debatiam a implementação ou viviam as primeiras experiências do ERE. Utilizando núcleos de significação, a análise buscou apreender o movimento dos/as docentes com relação ao objeto de estudo, aproximando-se das zonas de sentido presentes nos relatos e revelando suas determinações. Foi possível perceber que, naquele momento, os/as professores/as ainda não tinham internalizado formas de ensinar e avaliar as aprendizagens no novo formato e, em sua maioria, atribuíram o sentido de desconforto à experiência, indicando redução ou ausência de uma ou mais condições para que a docência e a aprendizagem fossem efetivas. O único sentido de bem-estar encontrado foi o de cuidar da saúde coletiva (sua e dos demais). O maior volume de respostas associou o ERE à perda de referências; ao despreparo pedagógico; à intensificação e sobrecarga de trabalho; às condições objetivas (sociais, tecnológicas ou de acesso) inapropriadas ou inexistentes, sobretudo para os/as estudantes; e às (im)possibilidades pedagógicas, descrevendo-o como um modelo intensificador de desigualdades, que poderia potencializar a

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increase precariousness and dropout in higher education, but, on the other hand, considering it as the only possible alternative for maintaining ties with the students. A small number of teachers suggested the sense of challenge and learning, associating the ERE to the modernization of teaching and the learning of new abilities.

precarização e a evasão no ensino superior, mas, por outro lado, considerando-o a única alternativa possível para a manutenção de vínculos com os/as estudantes. Um número reduzido de docentes sugeriu o sentido de desafio e aprendizagem, associando o ERE à modernização da docência e ao aprendizado de novas habilidades.

Keywords: Higher Education; Emergency Remote Education; Zones of Sense.

Palavras-chave: Educação Superior; Ensino Remoto Emergencial; Zonas de Sentido.

1 Introduction

In March 2020, the Ordinance nº 343 (MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO, 2020) authorized the replacement of face-to-face teaching with remote activities during the health emergency caused by Covid-19. Educational institutions then began to adopt emergency remote education (ERE) in order to fulfill the school year. ERE was a way of "[...] is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" (HODGES et al., 2020, s/p).

This study aimed to understand the senses attributed to ERE by university teachers. Thus, based on Historical-Cultural Psychology, it used sense as its main category of analysis.

Vygotsky (2009) takes the *word with meaning* as the unit of analysis and describes a double semantic referential intrinsic to the processes of signification. The first, *meaning*, is relatively stable, formed by shared semiotic systems, generalized and fixed in social practices; the other, *sense*, is more dynamic, inconstant, singularized in the personal and social experience of each subject and produced in the historical-cultural weave in relation to meanings. "The sense of a word is the sum of all the psychological facts that it awakens in our consciousness. Thus, sense is always a dynamic, fluid, complex formation, which has several zones of varying stability" (VIGOTSKI, 2009, p. 465). Understanding the senses seeks to reveal the psychological events that the subject *produces* in the face of reality as a "[...] particular semantic event, constructed through social relations, where a

range of signs are put into play, which allows the emergence of singularization processes in a historically and culturally situated interactional plot" (BARROS *et al.*, 2009, p. 179).

At the time of data collection, Brazil had been suspended from face-to-face classes for just over 100 days and the pandemic was growing, with 92.568 deaths and 2.666.298 Brazilians infected (G1, 2020a). Studies that seek to recognize the possible reverberations of this health crisis need to consider that families who lived in exclusionary situations felt it more intensely, since disaffiliation and social vulnerabilities did not begin with *the pandemic*, but preceded it.

In recent years, Brazil has experienced a political and social backlash, the culmination of which was the approval, in 2016, of the Amendment to the Constitution nº 95 (BRAZIL, 2016), which established a fiscal regime of budgetary constriction lasting 20 years. Vairão Junior and Alves (2017) point out that the State's attempt to control public debt by reducing primary expenditure mainly affected Social Security, Special Charges, Health, Education, Social Assistance, Labor, National Defense, Judiciary, Agriculture and Administration. For the authors, the most vulnerable part of the population – those who need these sectors the most – suffered the most.

In Education, for example, the 20th goal of the National Education Plan 2014-2024 (BRAZIL, 2014), which called for the expansion of Union investments in the public sector in order to achieve 7% of Gross Domestic Product by 2019 and 10% by 2024, was made unfeasible. In this scenario, dropout and evasion, which are already well-known issues in public education, intensified during the suspension of face-to-face classes due to the dismantling of public policies. Cunha, Silva and Silva (2020) point out that the ERE did not guarantee learning, quality or equal access to education for all students, resulting in exclusionary proposals that deepened inequalities. Added to this is the devaluation of the teaching profession – it is illustrative to remember the words that Mr. Milton Ribeiro, Minister of Education from July 2020 to March 2022, uttered in an interview with the Newspaper *O Estado de São Paulo*: "To be a teacher is to have

almost a declaration that the person has not been able to do anything else" (GRABOWSKI, 2020, s/p).

It was in this political and health context, shrouded in uncertainty and precariousness, that the research was proposed with a view to understanding how the movement to implement a new format for the objectification of teaching was perceived by teachers in higher education.

Next, the text presents the study method.

2 Method

The research followed a qualitative and exploratory methodology. Qualitative studies seek to gain a deeper understanding of the subjects' experiences, ways of thinking and acting in relation to the topic being researched, while the exploratory format aims to gain a general understanding of the object through approximate studies and is commonly used for topics that have been little explored or when the available bibliography is scarce (MINAYO, 2008) – as in the case of this study.

Data collection used *online* questionnaires distributed via the *Google Forms* platform between July 6 and 31, 2020, a time when the higher education institutions were studying ways to implement ERE or were having their first experiences – 43% of respondents reported that the institution(s) in which they worked was still analysing how it would adhere to ERE and 57% were already teaching remotely – mainly in the private sector.

The invitation to take part in the study was announced on social networks (*Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn*), *WhatsApp* and *e-mail*. A convenience approach was used, i.e. those who were interested in the subject responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was accessed and answered by 322 teachers at various educational levels. For this article, the responses from teachers working in higher education were selected, resulting in an analysis of 137 questionnaires.

The questionnaire had objective and discursive questions. The objective questions sought to characterize the respondents and were worked on

quantitatively. This article analysed the reports made by the teachers in two discursive proposals: the first, which had to be filled in, asked them to write down their thoughts and feelings about maintaining remote teaching activities while face-to-face classes had to be suspended. The other, located at the end of the questionnaire and optional, was less directive and asked them to comment on any aspects not covered. It was possible to see that the manifestations in these two spaces were aligned and the answers were analysed together. It should be added that the teachers were very generous in their writing, developing in-depth personal comments and reflections associated with their understanding of the ERE at that historical moment.

The analysis used the cores of signification, inspired by Aguiar and Ozella (2006; 2013), to grasp the *movement* of the respondents in relation to the object, with a focus on understanding the cognitive, affective and volitional aspects that constitute it. In the words of the authors: "our task is to apprehend the social mediations that constitute the subject, thus leaving the appearance, the immediate, and going in search of the process, the unsaid, the sense" (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013, p. 303).

The process begins with "floating readings" aimed at organizing the reports into *pre-indicators*, grouping together prominent elements linked to the object of the study. After re-reading, these are grouped into *indicators* based on their similarity, complementarity or opposition. Finally, the indicators are dialectically articulated with each other, in a movement subordinated to the theory, resulting in the *cores of signification*. According to Aguiar and Ozella (2006, p. 231), "the cores must express the central and fundamental points that have implications for the subjects, that involve them emotionally, that reveal their constitutive determinations". After the elaboration of the cores, it is possible to move on from the empirical to the interpretative, looking for "[...] the transformations and contradictions that occur in the process of constructing senses and meanings" (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013, p. 310), revealing the subjective movement related to social and historical conditions.

Last but not least, the research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee. The teachers read the informed consent form and agreed to take part in the study, and ethical principles were followed from the project to data analysis.

Next, the text characterizes the subjects and exposes the cores of signification.

3 Presentation of the Subjects and the Cores of Signification

As for gender, 65% identified themselves as women and 35% as men (there was a third option, other, which was not chosen by the group analysed here). As for age, 6% were aged between 27 and 32, 16% between 33 and 38, 19% between 39 and 43, 14.5% between 44 and 49, 19% between 50 and 55 and 25.5% over 55. The majority had more than 11 years' teaching experience (68.5%). As for training for teaching, 70% had a degree, 28.5% had a bachelor's degree and 1.5% were studying for a degree. As for their professional activity, 85.5% taught at a single higher education institution, 11% at two and 3.5% at three; 65% worked only at public institutions, 22% only at private institutions, 9.5% at both (public and private), 1.5% at mixed economy higher education institutions and 2% at institutions run by community councils. As for the form of employment, 59% were statutory employees, 25% were employed under the Consolidation of Labor Laws, 8.5% indicated more than one form of employment, 5% were hired on a temporary basis, 2% had an hourly contract and 0.5% was retired on voluntary service. As for the state in which the teachers lived, the majority were from Santa Catarina (46.5%), followed by Espírito Santo (14.5%), Rio Grande do Sul (7%), São Paulo (6%), Minas Gerais (5%), Paraná (5%), Bahia (3.5%), Mato Grosso (3%), Rio de Janeiro (3%), Distrito Federal (1.5%), Mato Grosso do Sul (1.5%), Paraíba (1.5%), Piauí (1.5%) and Maranhão (0.5%).

Four cores of signification were developed: *challenge and learning*; *loss of references*; *objective conditions*; and *pedagogical (im)possibilities*. In their presentation, it was decided to articulate extracts from the questionnaires in such a way as to form an organic whole. The teachers' reports have been written

in italics and in double quotation marks, followed by their numerical identification; omissions and insertions have been written in square brackets.

The first core, which was less representative in quantitative terms, grouped together exhibits that presented a sense of *challenge and learning* related to the ERE due to the perception that it brought about "*transformation and innovation*" (P76).

One teacher wrote that "*the pandemic has come to challenge our certainties and demand flexibility and renewal from us [...]. It will be a great challenge, but also a great learning experience*" (P3). One teacher wrote that he was trying to perceive the ERE "[...] *as a challenge that takes us out of our comfort zone*" (P86). The sense of innovation appeared in another statement: "[...] *it's time for schools/universities/teachers to move, modernize the educational space-time, reinvent themselves, add dynamics, autonomy, diversity, timeliness, break down walls and borders*" (P129). According to another teacher, it was necessary to "[...] *learn new skills when it comes to using learning technologies*" (P89). Descriptions of the lack of student interaction in the ERE were prevalent, but one teacher said exactly the opposite: "*Social isolation helped with class interactivity. It motivated student participation*" (P54).

The second core of signification grouped together answers that brought the sense of *loss of teaching references*. The loss of the university experience was reported as "*painful*": "*I miss my classroom, which I share with two other colleagues, the corridors, saying 'good morning', walking around the university*" (P5). Another teacher described that "*the lack of exchange of ideas with colleagues [...] is what causes the most strangeness and psychological discomfort. [...] There's also the lack of contact with those students interested in my work, [and me] in their work, [which] makes me worried, as if [they] were adrift*" (P49).

The "*feeling of solitary work*" (P84) appeared in different nuances, as in this teacher's writing: "*I feel alone in this process and quite cognitively tired because I have to think about everything without any materiality*" (P9). The inconvenience of not being able to observe the students' reactions during synchronous meetings was mentioned by many teachers: "*The possibility of*

being present helps us to 'read' the classroom in another way, through gestures, looks, facial expressions and the immediate possibility of dialog" (P71). One teacher mentioned that "[...] observing bodies/eyes in the classroom is fundamental to see if students are understanding the content" (P8). Another wrote that "face-to-face activity creates a much wider range of possibilities; contact, direct perception of the student's conditions; the debate of ideas and the effective participation of students" (P24).

Most of the reports highlighted the fact that students interacted little and accessed the materials, which generated the feeling "*[...] of planning lessons for no one*" (P88). One teacher described that the synchronous class generated "*[...] agony in talking to 'nobody' knowing that there are a lot of people*" (P13). One teacher said that ERE brought her "*sadness, frustration, a sense of pedagogical farce. I don't teach properly and they don't learn properly*" (P33).

The new model has led to work overload and has had repercussions on teachers' physical and mental health: "*flexibilization ends up overloading teachers a lot*" (P84). One teacher described feeling "*enormous fatigue, the feeling of working day and night, there aren't many moments of lightness and relaxation that [before the pandemic] took place on the way home and in the more limited [working] hours*" (P80). Another teacher said that "*everyone is demotivated and exhausted, including me, who at the end of the [online] classes is exhausted and yet I'm not satisfied with what I've been doing*" (P68). Another described how ERE was affecting her negatively: "*I often get distracted [in online classes], my attention and concentration are affected even though I consider myself to be a person who concentrates easily*" (P71).

This sentence sums up the displacement of references in ERE: "*I felt a total loss of professional identity. I had never studied the pedagogical process mediated by technologies. I really like the contact, the dialog close to the interlocutor, I became a professional in this logic*" (P129). The loss of identity generated "*a deep sense of sadness, uncertainty and impotence. I feel extinct (face-to-face classroom teacher)*" (P16). The deprivation of references fed "*low expectations, I'm going to do what's possible within the impossible*" (P134).

The third core of signification grouped together narratives that reflected on the *objective conditions* for carrying out the ERE, or lack thereof. Many teachers were concerned about the situation of the students, especially with regard to *internet* connectivity and their living conditions. One teacher summed up a concern that emerged in several reports: "[...] *many students find themselves in unfavorable conditions, without or with precarious digital tools, without a favorable family environment, having to care for the elderly, guide children in school chores and daily care, household chores, dividing the media between family members*" (P38). A colleague pointed out that "*there was concern about making content available digitally, but there was no concern about whether students had machines or data packages*" (P36).

One teacher wrote that there were no simple or short-term solutions to improve student connectivity: "[...] *it makes me anxious to know that next semester the same students will have problems with access*" (P108). Another wrote that the State should provide *internet* for students, "[...] *since the State imposed remote teaching without consulting the student or teaching population about its implementation*" (P89).

The third core also grouped together descriptions that mentioned the working conditions of the teachers themselves, pointing out adversities of various kinds. In the words of one teacher: "*I find it difficult to use the tools and, currently, I haven't found the time to explore or train myself to use these tools due to my personal reality (young child without a school, no support network in the city, husband teleworking)*" (P122). Another pointed out the "[...] *pressure on teachers to deal with a major change in planning, [I was] forced to learn a new function in record time*" (P55). Some described having to buy equipment to work online, like this teacher: "*I ended up buying a chair, keyboard, stand and table to be able to work. Apart from the cost of consultations and trips to the acupuncturist and chiropractor [to treat back pain]*" (P56). One teacher vented: "*we are using our homes, our equipment, our energy, our furniture, etc. to ensure that we can keep our classes going and we are led into a process of 'being thankful' that we haven't lost our jobs yet*" (P108).

The fourth core of signification grouped together the largest number of responses and sought to reveal the *pedagogical (im)possibilities* related to ERE. Many pointed out that adopting the remote model, as an alternative to face-to-face teaching, was a way of not exposing teachers, students and staff to coronavirus infection. One teacher wrote: "*Now is the time to preserve lives. Remote teaching is not perfect, it has problems, but these can be overcome or even recovered. But the lives of teachers and students are not*" (P107). Another commented that this period required "[...] *taking care of yourself and others, avoiding commuting on public transport and crowds in the classroom, where the recommended interpersonal distance cannot be maintained*" (P89).

In different ways, several teachers attributed to the ERE the sense of an "*academic palliative*" (P89) and that this was "*the possibility we have left*" (P2). We selected one writing that portrayed this type of feeling: "*at the moment, even though I have numerous reservations, I can't think of any other alternative*" (P70). One lecturer wrote that universities should "[...] *look for all possible ways to ensure that the teaching-learning process doesn't stop because of the pandemic*" (P128). For a colleague, "*we can't feel paralyzed*" (P47).

The sense of maintaining academic ties emerged in many reports, such as the one below: "*if we don't maintain some academic contact with our students now, I imagine there will be a lot of dropouts*" (P89). Another teacher emphasized "[...] *the importance of maintaining social interaction and keeping minds active*" (P55). One teacher mentioned the need to "*welcome*" students: "*Guaranteeing mental health is also guaranteeing access to studies and learning*" (P87). Another mentioned that it would be necessary to "[...] *reduce the demands on content at this time and place more value on people's health, [...] mental health (of teachers, students and families)*" (P11). In addition to academic ties, one teacher pointed out the social function of public universities and the need to resume the academic year. For her, it was "[...] *inconceivable for a public university, paid for by citizens' taxes, to lose the academic year*" (P131).

Adherence to ERE was reported to be immersed in an *ambivalence* of feelings. One teacher wrote that the modality was "[...] *insufficient, inequalities intensifier, but that it becomes the only possible way to mitigate the impacts of the absence of epistemological stimuli during the period of isolation*" (P116). One teacher mentioned a paradox due to Brazil's social inequality: "*remote education is contradictory: demanded by some students, but feared by those with precarious conditions (material or social)*" (P136). Another described a "*feeling of impotence, because while I know that remote teaching is not ideal, I also feel that the damage to students not having contact with the university during this long period of the pandemic is even worse*" (P130).

In this core, reports were grouped together that highlighted the *educational damage* caused by the ERE, because "[...] *the bond with the class is lost, the learning of debate, of listening to the contradictory, understanding the other person's positions, questioning one's own certainties, changing the way one understands the issue*" (P73). One teacher explained that "[...] *the act of teaching requires exchange. I don't feel that this exchange happens effectively remotely*" (P132). Another emphasized the "*loss of the character of the lesson as an intensive singular event*" (P44). One teacher described that "*the teaching and learning process is also affective and physical, which is limited in the digital form, which ends up requiring more focus and abstraction*" (P53).

The question of whether students were understanding the content was a recurring concern, as in this excerpt: "*I have the feeling that most students don't follow the classes in remote education*" (P67). One teacher emphasized the "[...] *great difficulty some students have in taking subjects and systematically attending classes, due to the adverse conditions*" (P73). In addition, "*in online classes [...] there is much less student participation and interaction*" (P55). As a result, a colleague vented: "*talking and not recognizing whether what I'm saying makes sense to my interlocutors is something that worries me*" (P2).

Some of the teachers felt that the ERE was more difficult because of the subjects they taught, as this excerpt shows: "*I'm a Brazilian Sign Language*

teacher, my classes are practical and there need to be exercises in the classroom for a better learning" (P115). Another teacher wrote: "*The body speaks, face-to-face interaction is necessary for the development of certain skills*" (P85).

This core also grouped together reports about "[...] *precariousness and evasion in Higher Education*" (P137). One teacher wrote: "*I have the impression that this process [ERE] is further disqualifying presence and participation as part of the social relationship that is established in the face-to-face pedagogical relationship*" (P25). A colleague mentioned that the ERE would facilitate "[...] *the implementation of a big business in Education that is expressing its merchandise face in an increasingly evident way*" (P16). Another feared "[...] *the uncritical and uncontrolled spread of distance learning (including teachers being replaced by automatons) [which] is already the reason for mass layoffs in the private sector, as well as being the goal of governments with a neoliberal economic orientation and [a] low regard for Education*" (P133). In this sense, one teacher alluded that the ERE could "[...] *legitimize remote classes as a substitute for face-to-face classes*" (P102). Another wrote that in the face of "[...] *Brazil's glaring social inequality, [...] [the ERE] only increases exclusion and social inequalities*" (P38). One teacher was blunt: "*I feel a sense of failure and despair at what it means to give in to remote teaching and open the doors to oligopolistic capital. It will be the death of critical thinking in higher education*" (P37). Another colleague wrote that she feared "*the precariousness of higher education [which] could be increased by the 'success' of remote teaching*" (P136).

The fourth core also included a small group of answers that sought to develop *other alternatives*. Defending the cancellation of the school year, one teacher suggested "[...] *activities to mediate political, economic and social understanding of the current moment*" (P48). Supporting this proposition, another wrote that "*this race against the clock to cover the content [...] is a waste of time, inhumane, exhausting and becomes a new work-related stressor. Graduate soon for what? Not lose content for what? Let's cancel 2020 and preserve life in all its dimensions*" (P122). A colleague proposed that *online* activities should be aimed at "[...] *consultancy practices, research guidance, study groups and any optional*

subjects in order to make the period enriching for students and teachers, while preserving curricular activities, compulsory subjects and other optional subjects in the context of face-to-face teaching" (P133).

Finally, the core of the *pedagogical (im)possibilities* related to the ERE welcomed a report that mentioned attention and caution regarding the possible effects that this model could bring: "[...] *it is necessary to know how to use and understand the diverse consequences of technologies and media in the lives of human beings, because there are cognitive issues that are still little explored, as well as issues that affect the physical body and health beyond what is understood today in ergonomics*" (P42).

Next, we sought to analyse the senses attributed by university professors in relation to the ERE at that historical moment.

4 Inter-core analysis

This topic sought to summarize the most relevant elements of the signification cores, bringing them closer to the zones of sense (VIGOTSKI, 2009) present in the research subjects' statements. To achieve this, the analysis considered the dialectic between meanings and senses, establishing them as the "contradictory unity of the symbolic and the emotional" (AGUIAR; OZELLA, 2013, p. 304). The meanings, which are historical and social productions, were taken as the starting point for the analysis and, through the process of interpretation, this shifted to the more unstable and fluid zones, in other words, to the zones of sense.

Data collection, as already mentioned, took place at a time when higher education institutions were holding meetings to plan the new format or rehearsing their first steps - of the teachers who answered the questionnaire, a slightly larger group had already resumed their teaching duties (57%). Data from the Ministry of Education show that, at that time, 20 federal higher education institutions had joined the ERE and 19 had kept their activities suspended; with regard to private higher education institutions, the Brazilian Association of

Higher Education Providers reveals that 78% had already joined the ERE since March 2020 (G1, 2020b).

In a macro sense, the analysis of the movement towards ERE showed that, at the time, teachers had not yet internalized ways of teaching and assessing learning in the new format and, using a variety of terms, many attributed a sense of *discomfort* to the experience. The only sense of well-being present in the writings was that of *looking after oneself and others*, as some teachers described the need to *preserve lives* and *online* interaction provided them with this possibility.

Still on the macro-structural side, one of the questions analysed asked teachers to describe the sensations they attributed to teaching activities without the presence of students and teachers in higher education institutions. A myriad of sensations and feelings emerged from the reports. The predominant feelings were: cognitive and mental tiredness, exhaustion, discouragement, anguish, anxiety and worry. The main feelings reported were: *isolation*, in the mention of a solitary job, associated with the loss of professional identity, the meaning of teaching and interactions (with peers and students); *depression*, in the description of agony, insecurity, sadness, impotence, fear, etc.; *inadequacy* caused by pedagogical unpreparedness, which generated frustration, failure and personal dissatisfaction; *security* for taking care of collective health (their own and that of others); and *challenge* and learning related to the new format.

Vygotsky (2009) describes that sensations and feelings integrate and modulate the senses, as these are affectively charged. For Toassa (2020, p. 180), senses are "hybrid[s] of affect, intellect and will operating in the world", interconnecting social, historical and cultural elements. Now, negative aspects predominated in the sensations and feelings related to the ERE, reinforcing the sense of *unease* attributed to the new format – the greater volume of responses indicated a reduction or absence of one or more conditions for teaching and learning to be carried out to satisfaction.

Breaking down the analyses into the interconnection between the cores of signification, it can be mentioned that a small number of teachers suggested a sense of *challenge and learning*, associating ERE with innovation, reinvention, modernization of teaching and the learning of new skills by the agents involved. On the other hand, the sense of *loss of teaching references* – more abundant – was objectified in reports that called the lack of contact with colleagues and students *disturbing* and the experience of *solitary* work. Many compared the remote and face-to-face formats and, almost unanimously, cited the superiority of the latter. The face-to-face classroom represented the *logic* in which these teachers had constituted themselves as professionals and the ERE caused a collapse of contexts. Many said that the impossibility of observing the students' bodies, looks and gestures deprived them of a powerful tool for evaluating pedagogical action. Moreover, according to the majority of teachers, student participation decreased and this led to the feeling of *planning lessons for no one* and feeding a *pedagogical farce*.

The activities developed in the ERE do not focus on the relationship between the subjects involved in the teaching and learning processes and can generate *interactive loneliness*, according to Wolton (2007). For this author, being multiconnected does not guarantee communicational efficiency and can incite a purely technical conversation because "all the competences that one has in the face of technique do not, in any way, induce a competence in human relations" (WOLTON, 2007, p. 101). Dussel (2011) adds that individual access to the *internet* (each using their own computer or cell phone) forges for students an "economy of attention" typical of this space and makes it difficult for teachers to monitor learning. For the author, "it is difficult to sustain frontal, simultaneous and homogeneous teaching in a context of technologies that propose a fragmentation of attention and more individualized paths for each user" (DUSSEL, 2011, p. 17).

Furthermore, the teachers were concerned about the *objective conditions* of the students to take the subjects in the ERE. They knew that many did not have favorable social conditions, technological resources or access to the *internet*. It was described that the State was responsible for providing conditions, but *anxiety*

was also mentioned in knowing that this would not be an easy issue to solve given the political-economic scenario of that period.

Digital connection was already a problem before the pandemic for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and/or living in rural areas. In 2018, the National Continuous Household Sample Survey, carried out by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics, revealed that around 25% of the population aged 10 and over did not access the *internet* during that period (AGÊNCIA ESTADO, 2020). In relation to undergraduates, Castioni et al. (2021, p. 413) state that the problem of access was "reduced and localized", reaching "[...] around 2% of the universe of undergraduates". According to the authors, the problem would be solved "by providing the necessary equipment".

It is worth remembering, however, that during the suspension of face-to-face classes, there were no state investments to expand connectivity for students and teachers; on the contrary, there were restrictions. The Ministry of Education closed 2020 with the lowest budget since 2011 and there were no consistent emergency programs to support schools and higher education institutions (GRABOWSKI, 2021). Thus, the ERE ended up leaving "[...] behind precisely those students from the most exploited and expropriated fractions who entered *via racial or public school quotas* and who deserve the best hopes of expanding democracy in the country" (LEHER, 2020, p. 1, my emphasis).

The working conditions of teachers were also mentioned in the answers to the questionnaire: teachers reported not having the technological knowledge needed to teach in the remote format; difficulties in reconciling academic work with childcare; lack of suitable equipment; and, above all, the intensification of work. It was clear from the reports that ERE promoted the growth of *ubiquitous work*, i.e. the digital format favored simultaneity, omnipresence and the blurring of boundaries between public and private and between work and non-work (LARA, 2020). Saraiva, Traversini and Lockmann (2020, p.18) point out that this model has accentuated the "accountability of teachers[which] tend[s] to strengthen the intensification and self-intensification of work, increasing teacher exhaustion".

In an attempt to compensate for the absence in person and encourage student participation, teachers described the use of various strategies: virtual synchronous meetings; recorded classes, texts and support materials available in virtual learning environments; videoconferences to answer students' questions, etc. According to Hodges et al. (2020, s/p), many teachers found the transition to ERE stressful, as the rush to implement it took second place to technical preparation, causing them to "improvise quick solutions in less-than-ideal circumstances". The eagerness to implement ERE resulted in practices that were not aligned with quality digital education and even made it difficult to qualify the teaching staff – it is interesting to note that the reports collected in this study *did not mention* preparatory courses or any other support measures from higher education institutions – private or public.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the most expressive core of signification was the one that grouped together the senses linked to *pedagogical (im)possibilities*. It is worth remembering that a considerable proportion of the respondents (70%) had a degree – so discussions of pedagogical content were part of their knowledge base, making them potentially more critical of the ERE.

Some statements revealed ambivalent senses, describing the modality as *inequalities intensifier*, but, at the same time, *the only way out at the time*, as a long period of academic distance was considered more damaging. The need to maintain students' *links* with higher education institutions and with academic knowledge emerged with different nuances, but many teachers reported *educational losses*, because, according to them, the act of teaching requires *exchange, debate*, listening to the *contradictory* and all of this, for various reasons, was hindered in the remote format.

Many teachers expressed concern about the students' low involvement in the pedagogical proposals and said they weren't sure if they were understanding the content. Possibly this was the reason why some teachers said they gave priority to *welcoming* students, taking care of their *mental health*, taking second place to the syllabus. In general, the answers showed a *low level of expectation* in relation to the ERE and, coupled with a poor grasp of remote teaching

techniques, this may have led to some simplifications. This movement was analysed by Pichetti (2020). According to the author, the teacher began to "monitor learning" in the ERE and this led to a "[...] reduction in training goals or expectations (reduction in content, reading load and, above all, the possibility of depth in dealing with knowledge)" (PICHETTI, 2020, s/p).

Additionally, a significant number of teachers feared that the ERE would – during its implementation and also as a future consequence – cause *precariousness* and *dropout rates* in teaching. They described how this format could contribute to the *disqualification* and *reconfiguration* of teaching and legitimize the remote model as a *substitute* for face-to-face teaching. For some, this virtual pedagogical experience could *open the door* to private capital in the public sphere and its success would deepen the precariousness of teaching work in higher education, as well as teaching itself.

In line with these comments, several researchers have criticized the way in which the ERE was carried out. At the time of its implementation, Soares (2020) stated that this format would not be restricted to the pandemic period, as there was strong pressure from information capitalism to innovate the public education system. Fieira, Evangelista and Flores (2020, p. 27) warned that the debate had the air of "technological fetishism", as the media sold the idea that ERE would "save" education during the suspension of face-to-face classes. Pichetti (2020) denounced that the hybrid format had been promoted as the model to be followed by higher education institutions since before the pandemic. The author warned that ERE subordinated training to certification and was capable of laying "[...] the objective and subjective foundations for a systematic and permanent implementation of the remote *logic* of organizing pedagogical activity in public universities" (PICHETTI, 2020, s/p, author emphasis).

Leher (2020) warned that most of the platforms used by education networks were managed by *Amazon, Microsoft, Facebook, Apple, Alphabet/Google*. According to the author, these five corporations have clear strategies for building a global market and ERE has become an enabler of this process. Williamson, Eynon and Potter (2020) described that, in 2020, an

international partnership was formed to mobilize resources and implement innovations aimed at expanding *online* education – the *Global Education Coalition*. This association, linked to UNESCO, brought together technology companies such as *Google, Microsoft, Facebook* and *Zoom*, with international financial organizations such as the OCDE and the World Bank, opening gaps for private platforms to extend their domains into previously unreachable territories. A similar analysis by Farage, Costa and Silva (2021) shows that the ERE would potentially deepen a project of capital's commodification of education in Brazil. Analysing both the document presenting the coalition proposed by UNESCO and another, proposed by the World Bank, in the same year, the authors point out that the references to the universalization of Information and Communication Technologies in both documents transcended the pandemic period and should "[...] remain in the post-pandemic as a strategy to mitigate inequalities in access to education, for example, in countries like Brazil" (FARAGE; COSTA; SILVA, 2021, p. 231).

As a result of the opening up of higher education institutions to platformization and private capital, one professor wrote that she feared the *death of critical thinking*. It is not necessary to establish a linear relationship between these points, but Cesarino (2022, p. 64/5) points out that, in the cybernetic architectures of platforms and in the logic that guides the technology industry, "the human user is not the agent, but the environment for the agency of non-human systems". This foundation contrasts with what teachers are used to and limits cognitive control over the pedagogical process. Cesarino (2022, p. 46) also warns that the media are central in contemporary times and, "as there is no unmediated relationship with reality, whoever controls these mediations controls people's own access to reality".

Looking for alternatives to the ERE, a small group of teachers suggested, in their answers to the questionnaire, the cancellation of the school year and carrying out extracurricular activities to maintain links between higher education institutions and undergraduates, such as research, study groups, debates, optional subjects or meetings aimed at mediating

their *political, economic and social understanding*. One teacher dared to ask: *Graduate soon for what?* Certainly, this is a question that lacks coherence for the capitalist system, because the proposals of this small group reflected another logic, challenging the productivist *status quo* that regulates academia and life in general.

5 Final considerations

This research sought to understand the senses produced by teachers about ERE. An excerpt from a teacher's account gave rise to the article's title: "the possible within the impossible". The antonyms "possible" and "impossible" contained in the fragment represent the contradictory meanings, ambiguities and limits that the ERE imposed on university teachers, as well as the sense of unease that many attributed to that experience which eclipsed the context in which they had been forged as professionals, making them unable to identify the symbolic and material assumptions considered necessary for quality education in the ERE.

Well, senses are produced in relation to historically and culturally situated meanings, revealing subjective positions correlated to social and historical ones. At the time of data collection, shared meanings had not yet been formed – supported by the teachers' reference groups and/or by recognized authors in the field of education – of how to teach in that context of exception. The suspension of face-to-face classes was disruptive and brought pedagogical insecurity. In addition, the rapid implementation of the remote model prevented higher education institutions from investing in the qualification of their teaching staff. Bearing these aspects in mind, it is not surprising that the teachers reported with pain and intense nostalgia the loss of references to teaching as they had known it until then. The final words of this text will seek to reflect two aspects that stand out in the cores of signification: the pedagogical and the political.

With regard to the pedagogical, one of the main senses attributed to the ERE was the absence of one or more conditions for effective teaching and

learning: the teachers had not adapted to the format technologically and didactically; virtuality prevented interactions and visualizations that were seen as essential for pedagogical action; there was an overload and accumulation of tasks of various kinds for all those involved; there was a realization of the lack of objective conditions for many students to follow the classes in that format, whether these were social, technological or access conditions; there was a perception of low participation in virtual activities, which generated uncertainty as to the effective learning of the content.

As for the political, although many teachers reproduced the discourse propagated by the media that the ERE was the only possible way out at that time, it was also perceived as a modality that intensified inequalities and could cause precariousness and evasion in higher education – both during the time away from face-to-face activities and, also, in the post-pandemic, by increasing engagement in the remote logic of organizing pedagogical action. This could contribute to the entry of private information capital into higher education, taking out of the hands of the main agents involved in the educational act - teachers and students - the leading role in this process.

To close this text, it is interesting to recall the response of a teacher who warned that the *consequences of technologies and media* for people were little explored. Cesarino (2022) mentions the studies of Edward Lorenz in the 1970s, whose theory became known as the "butterfly effect". Lorenz points out that, in very complex systems, small changes in the initial values (*inputs*) generate unpredictable changes and it is impossible to calculate exactly how the system will behave. Well, education is a highly complex system and carries within it the contradictions and possibilities of the society in which it is inserted. The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the causative agent of Covid-19, was the "flapping of a butterfly's wings" that caused unimaginable changes in all spheres of human sociability. ERE was certainly one of them and, now that face-to-face classes have been resumed in higher education institutions, studies need to seek to understand the pedagogical, political and many other aspects that involved its adoption and what its resonances were. We need to

understand the legacy left by this period of non-face-to-face teaching so that, collectively, we can engage in struggles to guarantee quality higher education for our young people.

“Lo posible dentro de lo imposible”: significados atribuidos por docentes universitarios relacionados con la enseñanza remota de emergencia

RESUMEN

El estudio tuvo como objetivo comprender los significados atribuidos a la enseñanza a distancia de emergencia (EDE) por profesores universitarios. La recolección de datos utilizó cuestionarios en línea aplicados en un momento en que las instituciones de educación superior estaban debatiendo la implementación o viviendo las primeras experiencias de EDE. Utilizando núcleos de significado, el análisis buscó captar el movimiento de los docentes en relación al objeto de estudio, acercándose a las zonas de significado presentes en los relatos y revelando sus determinaciones. Se pudo notar que, en ese momento, los docentes aún no habían internalizado las formas de enseñar y evaluar el aprendizaje en el nuevo formato y, en su mayoría, atribuían una sensación de malestar a la experiencia, indicando una reducción o ausencia de uno o más condiciones para que la enseñanza y el aprendizaje sean efectivos. La única sensación de bienestar encontrada fue cuidar de la salud colectiva (la suya y la de los demás). El mayor volumen de respuestas asociaron el EDE a la pérdida de referencias; falta de preparación pedagógica; la intensificación y sobrecarga de trabajo; condiciones objetivas (sociales, tecnológicas o de acceso) inadecuadas o inexistentes, especialmente para los estudiantes; y (im)posibilidades pedagógicas, describiéndolo como un modelo que intensifica las desigualdades, lo que podría aumentar la precariedad y la evasión en la educación superior, pero, por otro lado, considerándolo el único posible alternativa para mantener los vínculos con los estudiantes. Un pequeño número de docentes sugirieron una sensación de desafío y aprendizaje, asociando los EDE con la modernización de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de nuevas habilidades.

Palabras clave: Educación universitaria; Enseñanza Remota de Emergencia; Zonas sensoriales.

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