

Religious education teachers: exploratory study on their professional performance¹

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ABSTRACT

This study has object of analysis the professional performance of Religious Education teachers in the municipal network of a city in the State of Ceará. It also aims at understanding their perception about Religious Education and how they have been building their classes, taking on theoretical basis the discussion on teacher professional development (MARCELO, 2009; NÓVOA, 2009, FORMOSINHO, 2009; IMBERNÓN, 2011). Based on an exploratory qualitative research, the data were produced through of an online questionnaire, in which 30 teachers responded. The results showed that the teachers constantly experience work precariousness, lack of institutional support, and a lonely search for the construction of theoretical and methodological tools to help them in their daily classes. As to conclude, it is necessary to carry out management policies and formative monitoring of these teachers, so that the problems that revolve Religious Education can be reduced.

KEYWORDS: Religious Education. Teaching performance. Professional development.

Professores De Ensino Religioso: Estudo Exploratório Sobre Sua Atuação Profissional

RESUMO

O presente estudo tem como objeto de análise a atuação profissional dos professores da disciplina de Ensino Religioso na rede municipal

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de uma cidade no Estado do Ceará e objetiva compreender a percepção destes sobre o Ensino Religioso e o modo como eles constroem suas práticas pedagógicas, tomando como base teórica o debate sobre desenvolvimento profissional docente (MARCELO, 2009; NÓVOA, 2009, FORMOSINHO, 2009; IMBERNÓN, 2011). Nesta pesquisa qualitativa exploratória, os dados foram produzidos por meio de um questionário *on line*, respondido por 30 professores. Os resultados demonstraram que os professores vivenciam em seu trabalho a precarização, a falta de apoio institucional e uma busca solitária e individual de construção dos aportes teórico-metodológicos para a disciplina. Concluimos que faz-se necessário realizar políticas de gestão e acompanhamento formativo destes docentes, de modo que as problemáticas no âmbito desta disciplina possam ser minoradas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ensino Religioso. Atuação docente. Desenvolvimento profissional.

Profesores de enseñanza religiosa: estudio exploratorio de su desempeño profesional

RESUMEN

El presente estudio tiene como objeto de análisis el desempeño profesional de los docentes de la disciplina de Enseñanza Religiosa en la red municipal de una ciudad en el Estado de Ceará. Tiene como objetivo comprender las percepciones de estos sobre la Enseñanza Religiosa y la forma en que desarrollan sus prácticas pedagógicas. Para ello, se toma como base teórica el debate sobre el desarrollo profesional docente (MARCELO, 2009; NÓVOA, 2009, FORMOSINHO, 2009; IMBERNÓN, 2011). En esta investigación exploratoria cualitativa, los datos se produjeron a través de un cuestionario *online*, donde respondieron 30 profesores. Los resultados mostraron que los docentes presentan precariedad, falta de apoyo institucional y una búsqueda solitaria e individual para el desarrollo de su disciplina de trabajo. Entre las conclusiones se destaca, que es necesario llevar a cabo políticas de gestión y acompañamiento formativo en los docentes, para que los problemas de la disciplina se puedan reducir.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Enseñanza Religiosa. Desempeño docente. Desarrollo profesional.

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Introduction

The present study focuses on the professional performance of teachers who teach Religious Education in the municipal school system of a city in the state of Ceará and aims to understand the perception of these teachers about Religious Education and how they have been building their classroom practices. Thus, we asked the following questions: What is the profile of the Religious Education teachers in this network? What conceptions of Religious Education permeate their practice? What are their objective and subjective conditions of work and professional development?

The formulations on teacher professional development (NÓVOA, 1992; GARCIA, 1999; FORMOSINHO, 2009; IMBERNÓN, 2010) have in common the fact that they recognize that this is a permanent process, both individual and collective, and that the school is the privileged *locus* of training, which contributes significantly to the development of the teacher's professional competencies through the most diverse experiences, both formal and informal that occur there. A construct outlined in the expectation of overcoming the overlap between initial training and teacher improvement that historically has marked the debate on teacher education, broadening the understanding of the learning process of teaching (FARIAS; ROCHA, 2016; HOBOLD; FARIAS, 2020).

The professional development of teachers is characterized as a training process throughout the professional cycle of teachers and is "intrinsically related to the improvement of working conditions, with the institutional possibility of higher levels of autonomy and capacity of action of teachers individually and collectively" (GARCIA, 1999, p. 145), as well as necessarily implies a "crossroads of paths" (*idem*, p. 139), which merge the development of the person and the professional teacher, the school organization and the curriculum. For this reason, the various stages of learning to teach - initial training, the first years of teaching, insertion situations in the profession throughout the career, and the continuous search for improvement - require, in addition to the individual contribution, institutional investment.

It is from this perspective that it is argued that the "teachers, like any other human beings, are produced through the relationships established with their physical and social environment", through the numerous and diverse experiences of their personal and professional life, material and symbolic interactions that constitute their identity, here understood as a "socio-historical process linked to the humanization of man" (FARIAS et al., 2014, p. 56). In these terms, in the context of professional development, the professional identity of teachers are constituted from multiple sources, which go beyond a technical and formal process of learning the knowledge of the profession, and refers to the various spaces of socialization experienced by the subjects throughout their lives. It is a personal construction, on one hand, since it derives from the teacher's life story, from the meaning he gives to teaching, from his pedagogical practices, and from his education. On the other hand, it is also a social construction that "takes place within the groups and categories that structure society and that give the person a role and a social status. (BREZEZINSKI, 2002, p. 02).

It is important to highlight that the professional teaching identity should be seen not only in its formal dimension and practices, but also including its subjective dimension, understanding it from the teacher as a person and professional, with his own way of doing teaching that bypasses the impositions and institutional rationalizations about his performance (ARAÚJO, 2014).

This understanding is in accordance with the thought of Pimenta (1999, p. 19) when he states that professional identity is not only built from the review of the meanings of society and the social meanings of the profession, and the reaffirmation of culturally consecrated practices, but it is also built "[...] by the meaning that each teacher, as actor and author gives to the teaching activity in his daily life from his values, his way of situating himself in the world, his anxieties and wishes, the meaning he has in his lives as teacher".

Because it is a process in which the teacher constantly gives meaning to his practice, the teaching identity is the stage of constant conflicts, since

the teacher is called at each moment and stage of his professional life to build ways of being and being in the profession (NÓVOA, 2000). In this direction, it seems necessary to reinforce the argument of Veiga (2010, p. 14) by highlighting that teaching "requires professional training for its exercise: specific knowledge to exercise it properly or, at least, the acquisition of skills and knowledge linked to the teaching activity to improve its quality", a process that occurs throughout the career. Nevertheless, we must also remember, as Tardif and Raymond (2000) do, that "knowing how to teach" implies knowledge of life and knowledge that depends on a person's personality and personal know-how.

It is understood, therefore, that teacher's professional development is something beyond the formal aspects of training, and necessarily implies the dimension of the teacher's experience's practice that is sustained in the analysis, reflection and (inter)subjective intervention of the teacher in concrete situations of teaching and learning, permanently, thus ensuring the conscious exercise of his professionalism. (FORMOSINHO, 2009; IMBERNÓN, 2011).

It is precisely this understanding that has mobilized us to problematize the professional condition of teachers of Religious Education in Brazilian public schools, particularly in Ceará, in view of the peculiarities that surround this professional exercise: a curricular component that lacks an epistemological identity and a professional identity for its teachers.

In the State of Ceará, the Education Council approved the Resolution nº 404/2005, based on articles 19 and 20 of the Federal Constitution, on the LDB (Law nº 9.394/96, article 33 as amended by Federal Law nº 9457/97), in the National Council of Education (NCE) Opinions nºs 05/97 (CP), 296/99 (CES), 765/98 (CES) and 63/2004 (CES), in the Resolution nº 0351/98, and in the CEC Opinions nº 0997/98, 1004/98, 0951/2000, and 060/2005, establishing new provisions for Religious Education in the public schools of the Ceará State Educational System, including new criteria for defining content and for hiring teachers.

The articles 4º, 5º, 6º, 7º, and 8º of the Resolution nº 404/2005, highlighted above, deal with the criteria for the eligibility and admission of teachers for this subject, who can also be people with a religious background, obtained in a course offered by a religious institution (Theology, *Diaconia*, and similar), as long as they have a High School level (Normal modality) or College degree (Pedagogy or a Special Pedagogical Training Program) that qualifies them to teach in Elementary School.

On a national scope, we observed the Bill nº 9.208/2017, authored by former Congressman Jean Willys (PSOL-RJ), which suggested changing Law nº 9.394, of December 20, 1996, so that the subject of Religious Education could be taught by teachers with a degree in Religious Sciences, Social Sciences, History, Philosophy, or other areas of knowledge related to the study of religious phenomena.

We can extract from these documents at least two relevant issues for this study. The first is the direct relation of the Religious Studies graduate as the professional teacher qualified to teach the subject of Religious Education, imposing on him a professional identity proper to this area of knowledge, since he needs to have the curricular, disciplinary, and pedagogical knowledge for such exercise. The second issue is the great lack of graduation courses in Religious Studies, which do not meet the demands of a country with such a capillary educational network, which, according to data from the 2017 School Census, conducted by INEP⁴, has 107,512 public schools of regular elementary education, 4,487 of them in the state of Ceará alone.

Thus, all over the country, teachers with the most varied types of initial higher education degrees (Bachelor's in Theology or *Diaconia*, Social Sciences, History, Philosophy or similar) are admitted through an intense legal "juggling act", as can be seen in the aforementioned documents, or teachers with other degrees, in an improvised way, in situations of filling vacancies, for example, are "requested" to exercise this subject, mostly

⁴ Source: http://qedu.org.br/estado/106-ceara/censo-escolar?year=2017&dependence=0&localization=0&education_stage=0&item=

"optional" (CUNHA, 2013) in conditions sometimes strange (such as absence or curricular proposals in dissonance with the legislation, inadequate schedules, absence/inadequacy of didactic reference material, etc.) in the municipal and state education networks of the country.

This fact can be considered as an obstacle to the epistemological and methodological construction of Religious Education as a curricular component and its effectiveness in classroom practice, nevertheless, it becomes a problem in the professional development of these teachers, especially for those who do not have specific training in Religious Sciences, who need to re-signify their professionalism around a new identity: that of "being" a teacher of Religious Education.

These concerns reinforce the pertinence of the present analysis, in order to contribute to existing studies on the problematics and complexities of the professional performance of Religious Education teachers in public schools (MARTINS FILHO, 2009; SOUSA, 2011; IACZINSKI, 2013; ARAÚJO, 2014; OLIVEIRA, 2015; LEÃO, 2016).

Methodological Path

In order to answer the proposed objective, we conducted an exploratory, descriptive study with a qualitative approach in the municipal school system of a county in the state of Ceará, located in the "sertão" region of the Northeast of Brazil, with approximately 75,000 inhabitants and an educational network composed of 54 schools, 38 of them of Elementary Education, which can be identified as a typical medium-sized county in this region of the country. The survey took place between August and October 2019, with the participants being only the network teachers who taught the subject of Religious Education. The list of these teachers was obtained by request to the Municipal Secretariat of Education, resulting in a population of 57 teachers.

The data production occurred through the electronic application, via Google Form, of a 47-question questionnaire structured in three blocks:

Personal Data (15), Academic and Professional Training (11), and Professional Activity (21), composed of closed and open questions, and questions in the form of Likert-type evaluation scales. We obtained feedback from 30 teachers, or 51.7% of the population, being a statistically representative sample, considering a sampling error of 10% at a 95% confidence level ($p = 0.05$). All participants gave their free and informed consent to participate in the research, which was also done digitally. Each of the research participants was assigned a code (P1, P2, P3...P30) to identify their answers in the analysis process.

Microsoft Excel 2010 and JASP Statistics version 11.0 were used for data tabulation and analysis. The characterization of the socio-professional profile (gender, race, religion, marital status, occupational situation, time in teaching, time teaching Religious Education) and the items of the likert and likert-type scales (RE [religiosity/spirituality] - 03 items; CP [level of professional knowledge] - 03 items, PA [professional performance] - 02 items; GC [degree of agreement] - 09 items) were performed through descriptive and inferential statistics.

The Mann-Whitney U test (for two independent samples), the Kruskal-Wallis test (for three or more independent samples), and Dunn's post hoc test were used to analyze the difference between the socio-professional profile variables in relation to the level of religiosity/spirituality, the degree of professional knowledge/activity, and the level of agreement of the research participants referred to the likert and likert-type scale items. We emphasize the fact that, as the Shapiro-Wilk normality test detected that none of the above variables has a normal distribution, we decided to use these tests, which, being non-parametric, do not presuppose knowledge of the data distribution, as well as of the population parameters, such as mean and variance⁵.

⁵ According to Gibbons and Chakraborti (2003), the Mann-Whitney test is used to verify whether or not two independent groups belong to the same population ($H_0: n_1 = n_2$). Otherwise, one rejects the null hypothesis (H_0) and assumes that the two groups are different ($H_1: n_1 \neq n_2$). In the same vein, the Kruskal-Wallis test analyzes the difference between the medians to compare three or more independent samples ($n_1, n_2, n_3, \dots, n_n$), reporting whether there is a difference between at least two of these groups. Its application uses the numerical values transformed into ranks and grouped in a single data set,

For the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, we opted for the qualitative analysis of the answers, based on Bardin's content analysis (2011), triangulating them with the other questions described above.

According to the inferential statistics performed, we found that there was a significant difference by "occupational situation" in the responses of participants in items 02 ($p= 0.01$) and 03 ($p=0.01$) of the scale of level of professional knowledge (PC), as well as by "time teaching Religious Education" in the responses of participants in item "h" of the scale degree of agreement (GC) with the assertions about the R.E. ($p = 0.03$).

This implies that in the presentation and discussion of the results only the differences by "occupational situation" and by "time teaching Religious Education" in the situations mentioned above were considered, since there was no significant difference between the groups in the other aspects of the socio-professional profile.

Presentation of results and discussion

The group of 30 participants was characterized as being composed of elementary school teachers whose ages range between 28 and 56 years, with a higher occurrence of people 38 years or older (mean = 42, standard deviation = 8.8); 20 (66.7%) are female and 10 (33.3%) are male; 16 (53.3%) are married, 07 (23.3%) are single, 05 (16.7%) have a stable union, 01 (3.3%) is divorced, and 01 (3.3%) is a widower; 16 (60%) define themselves as brown, 08 (26.7%) as white, and 04 (13.3%) as black. 29 (96.7%) define themselves as heterosexual and 01 (3.3%) as homosexual. A group of 26 (86.7%) of them does not identify with any ethnic group, 01 (3.3%) as black, 01 (3.3%) as indigenous, and 01 (3.3%) as quilombola. As for religion, 18 (60%) are Catholic, 05 (16.7%) have no religion, 04 (13.3%) are evangelical, 01 (3.3%) is a spiritist, 01 (3.3%) is a Seventh-day Adventist, and 01 (3.3%) is a Christian.

in which the comparison of the groups is performed by means of the average of the ranks (average rank). Dunn's multiple comparisons test, on the other hand, is used after the Kruskal-Wallis test, if and only if the K-W test allows rejecting H0. For this reason, it is sometimes called Dunn's post-test or Dunn's post-hoc test.

Religiosity/spirituality (RS)

More than half (19 teachers) say they are considerably spiritual (51.7% "very much"; 4.3% "quite a lot"). Among the group of 26 participants who said they had religion (83.3%), 21 of them declared low engagement/frequency in their religion (53.8% "more or less"; 23.1% not much; 3.8% not at all), however 15 consider themselves to be quite religious (46.2% "a lot", 11.5% "quite a lot").

About this evidence, it is noteworthy that there is no relationship between having religiosity and being a competent teacher of Religious Education, since it is a school subject and knowledge of religion, as a historical-cultural data of great importance for the ethical purposes of educational action, comes from specific academic training (SOARES, 2010).

Training and professional knowledge (PK)

Regarding academic background, 21 of the participants (70%) have a *lato sensu* post-graduate degree, specialization type, none of them holding a Master's degree or Ph. 19 teachers (63.3%) have a Normal High School degree and 14 have a Pedagogy degree (46.6%), and there are also teachers with degrees in Biology, Chemistry, History, Geography, Literature and Mathematics.

Almost all of them (29 teachers) had never taken any training course for Religious Education, with 25 (83.3%) of them claiming to be in the subject temporarily. Only one teacher took a short course in theology, considering it to be specific to the area. It was also mentioned that the Municipal Secretariat of Education does not offer any kind of training in this area, a fact confirmed in consultation with the agency itself, on the grounds that there was never any demand from teachers. This data corroborates the idea that teachers working in this area do not have appropriate training for this purpose, given the scarcity of undergraduate courses for teacher training in Religious Education in the country, justified

in part by the absence of guidelines and opinions favorable to the creation of such courses (AMARAL; OLIVEIRA; SOUZA, 2017).

In the items that deal with the level of knowledge of the subject's normative documents, based on values below 3, which indicate a tendency to a little knowledge, and values above 3, which indicate a tendency to a high level of knowledge, the average rankings (AR)⁶ in the three items revealed average knowledge, whose values point to insufficiency (2.5; 2.5 and 2.7 respectively). When questioned about the topic, 28 teachers (93.3%), claimed not to have sufficient knowledge about Art. 33 of LDB n° 9.394/96, as amended by law n° 9.475/97 that deals with Religious Education, nor of the Proposal for Religious Teaching of the BNCC, in the case of 28 teachers (93.3%), nor of the Curricular Proposal for Religious Teaching of the county, for 29 (96.7%) of them. These data are detailed in Table 01:

TABLE 1: Frequency distribution of the teachers participating in the research about their level of professional knowledge (PK) of the curricular knowledge of Religious Education.

Level of knowledge of (PK)	Nn	Ins	Reg	Suf	Vr	Average ranking (AR)	Total
	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)		
1) Art. 33 of LDB n° 9.394/96, as amended by law n° 9.475/97 that deals with Religious Education?	5 (16,7)	6 (20,0)	17 (56,7)	2 (06,7)	–	2,5	30
2) The Curricular Proposal for Religious Teaching of the BNCC?	4 (13,3)	10 (33,3)	14 (46,7)	2 (06,7)	–	2,5	30
3) The Curricular Proposal for Religious Education of the Municipal Education Secretariat?	4 (13,3)	9 (30,0)	12 (40,0)	3 (10,0)	2 (06,7)	2,7	30

Legend: Nn (None); Ins (insufficient); Reg (Regular), Suf (sufficient); Vr (very)

Source: prepared by the authors

The Mann-Whitney U-test indicated significant difference by "occupational status" in the responses of the participants regarding items 02

⁶ The average ranking (AR) allows on a scale to point out the trend of an evaluation. It is calculated from the division between the weighted average of the ranks of a Likert/ Likert type scale by the total number of subjects in the sample.

($p = 0.006$) and 03 ($p = 0.021$) of the professional knowledge (PK) level scale above. This indicates that temporary teachers claimed to have more knowledge about the Curriculum Proposal for Religious Education of the current BNCC and about the Curriculum Proposal for Religious Education of the Municipal Education Secretariat, than the concurrent teachers. The fact that temporary teachers need to establish their professional quality with their peers in this context, precisely because they are in a situation of insertion in the profession (ALARCÃO; ROLDÃO, 2014), may be an explanatory element of this difference. Teachers who are new to a teaching network, even if they are not living their first experiences in teaching, feel insecure and need to demonstrate that they are capable to their colleagues and that they know how to develop their work well and, therefore, are always attentive to the guidelines that regulate their work.

The professional performance (PP) of Religious Education teachers

The participants' answers revealed that their professional performance in Religious Education is marked by professional loneliness and precariousness. It was observed that 25 teachers are permanent (83.3%) and 5 (16.7%) are temporary, and that 20 (66.7%) have been teaching for 7 years or more.

All participants also work in areas other than their initial training, such as Arts, History, Geography, Science, English Language, Physical Education, and Mathematics. Of these, 16 have been teaching Religious Education for less than 4 years (53.3%), which denotes a possible high turnover of teachers in this subject in schools. In the group studied, 29 teachers (96.7%) work in only one school, 21 teach religious education in 2 to 4 classes (70%), and 25 of them work in the final years of elementary school (83.3%).

About how they started teaching Religious Education, two reasons were more recurrent. For 16 of them (53.3%) it was to fill the teaching load and for 7 (23.3%) it was because the school management imposed it on them. One of them said that his assignment was because he was from the "humanities area" (P05)

and only 3 of them (10%) said they liked or had affinity with the subject. P19's answer called our attention for the possibility she found to bring her experience in the Church to the exercise of the discipline, when she said that "Initially [it was] to supplement my workload, but also because I have an experience of community which favors the dynamics of the discipline".

An unusual fact is that, even though all of them reported that they had never had any kind of training in the area, 16 teachers (53.3%) said they were prepared to teach the subject. Teacher P05, for example, says that he feels prepared because he has a degree in History and continued training in human rights. However, a good part of them associate their preparation to the fact that it is a subject that brings reflections for life, ethical and moral themes, an understanding that possibly also explains the fact that they do not engage in training courses in the area. The speech of P26 is emblematic on this point, when mentioning that: "Despite not having training in the area, I like teaching religion classes, because we address issues pertinent to human relationships."

Among the 09 teachers (30%) who categorically stated that they did not feel prepared to teach the subject, most of them emphasized the fact that they had no training or experience in the area, as P30 said, "because I believe that the ideal is that each teacher teach in his or her area of training. And even if I study and plan I will always lag behind those who are in the area".

Regarding the contents they most like to cover in the subject, 21 (70%) teachers mentioned human relations and 16 (53.3%) ethics and human values, which justifies the claim of most of the aforementioned teachers that they feel prepared to teach the subject. It is assumed that these themes are easier to work with students because they are based on "common sense" and on a very subjective idea of what Religious Teaching means to them. This is also explained by the low level of knowledge they have about what Tardif (2014) calls disciplinary and curricular knowledge about Religious Education.

Social themes (sexual violence, bullying, environment), about religious experience (faith, religiosity, spirituality) and knowledge of religion (characteristics of religions, religious diversity) were mentioned less expressively (36.7%, 23.3%, and 10% respectively).

We understand that a subject is not taught according to what the teacher understands or decides is necessary to be taught or not. It should be the result of a wide discussion among the internal and external agents of the school who define the teaching programs, because these are the instruments that, according to Tardif and Lessard (2011, p.207), "allow teachers to organize their action in terms of objectives, expectations, sequences, and schedule.

Interestingly, one teacher said he teaches *LIBRAS* (*brazilian sign language*), which suggests, along with this whole miscellany of themes mentioned, the lack of monitoring mechanisms by school managers and the Municipal Education Secretariat, until the present moment of this research, of the teaching work performed in this subject, contrary to the legislation that deals with the theme and causing the "pedagogical revelry" stated by Cunha (2013):

What happens in Religious Education classes comes from a varied menu. In some classes are taught a particular religion, in others, a kind of common denominator of the Christian tradition religions (Catholic and Evangelical), [...] in others are taught "values", [,,] a kind of devout Moral and Civic Education, of sad memory. Sexual relations outside marriage, homosexuality, abortion and drugs are frequent themes in these classes. This, despite the fact that the transversal themes of the National Curricular Parameters for Elementary Education have a secular treatment. (CUNHA, 2013, p. 936)

In fact, the absence of accompaniment was mentioned by at least 8 of the 21 teachers⁷ who answered about the reason for implementing "nothing" (4 teachers or 20.4%) or "only partially" (15 teachers or 71.6%) the Curricular Proposal for Religious Education of the Municipal Education Secretariat in their

⁷ Of the 30 participating teachers, 09 teachers did not answer this item of the questionnaire.

classes. This is what was evidenced, for example, in the statements: "We did not receive support or any proposal to work in the classroom". (P6); "I was never presented to the Municipal Curriculum Proposal". (P12); "there is no teacher training course for the professionals of the area" (P27).

The lack of teaching material is another facet of this problem, also pointed out by 17 teachers (56.7%) when asked about what difficulties they face in the subject of RE. None of the participants use textbooks, and all use loose materials (reflective texts, dynamics, songs, handouts, audios, videos, films) mostly, as pointed out by 23 teachers (76.7%), taken from the Internet. As the Secretariat of Education does not have any kind of workbook or textbook indication, Religious Education teachers end up seeking on their own and in an individualized way to organize the teaching materials they will use in their classes, a fact also pointed out in other studies (SILVA, 2010; ARAÚJO, 2014).

When asked what they would like to be covered in a training course for Religious Education in which they could participate, the majority of 16 teachers (53.3%) emphasized the issue of curricular subsidies and methodologies for working with students in Religious Education. Some proposed studying specific topics such as secularism, African and indigenous religiosity, religious and cultural diversity, prejudice, and religious intolerance. Teacher P15 pointed out the desire to study "themes necessary for moral education". Other teachers proposed broader directives such as "propose themes to work on in each grade/year" (P06), "guide on how to teach Religion" (P24), making obvious in these cases the lack of knowledge about the curriculum proposal already existing in the county where they work.

Another of our research questions was whether the religious faith (or philosophy of life) of the teachers shows itself present in the way they conduct their Religious Education classes, in which 24 teachers (80%) answered affirmatively, and, in at least 16 of them (53.3%), very strongly (always and in almost every situation).

In the religious aspect, it is clear the combination of personal life with professional life among the participants, which reiterates the argument of Tardif (2014) that teaching knowledge is social because it is constituted at the confluence of several other knowledges coming from society (family, school, university, communities, etc.), which implies the impossibility of a "neutral" school practice or detached from the teacher's life story, leaving him the challenge of reflecting on the dialogue between the curriculum, the social reality, and his personal expectations about the student's education.

Teachers' perceptions about the subject of Religious Education

The importance of the subject for the formation of the students was very evident in 26 of the 30 participants (86.7%). Only 03 (10%) said that the subject "makes no difference" and 01 (3.3%) said the subject is "not very important". None of the participating teachers claimed that the subject is unnecessary as a curricular component for the student's education.

In large part, the importance attributed by teachers to Religious Education as a curricular component in the students' education is associated with the "awakening" of ethical and spiritual values in human coexistence, elements considered necessary in the development of students' sociability, of caring for oneself, for others, and for life. These issues, however, should be worked having as substrate the knowledge of religious and philosophies of life, in their manifestations, experiences and knowledge in different times and spaces to understand them, respect them and value them. (BRASIL, 2017, p. 487).

As an example, we highlight the speech of teacher P05, who attributed the importance of the subject "For introducing the student to the idea of value, tolerance, respect, and diversity at school". It is very intense, in most of the speeches, the idea of a subject that, in their perceptions, contributes significantly to the personal growth of the students, the formation of their character, the improvement of human relations, and coexistence in society.

On the other hand, at least 03 teachers in this group attributed an importance in character of religious formation to the subject, as an adjunct to the moral-doctrinal education of religious institutions. This importance was attributed to the fact that the subject of Religious Education helps "To awaken faith" (P04), and also to the fact that "It is a necessity to work with young people on ethical, spiritual, and religious formation. Thus, awakening the appreciation of life, virtues, and good deeds" (P16).

Among those teachers who answered "it makes no difference" or "it is not very important", the reasons given in the first case were "Because there is no guidance or training to act. It is just to complement the workload" (P15), and "It is one of the subjects that students end up considering unimportant" (P30), revealing that the subject seems to be neglected by school management bodies both inside and outside the school, leaving teachers without support and students unmotivated.

In the second case, there is a concern that the subject may become a space for ideological/religious indoctrination, with the risk of the teachers, deliberately or not, influencing the students with their opinions and personal values, given that they construct their contents on their own, as depicted by teacher P14 when he said that "We can be biased. That is dangerous". This fact can be considered when there is no collaborative work among teachers that, in light of the curricular proposal of the subject, builds a collective work that makes it possible to minimize such biases in teaching practice.

The last 09 items of the questionnaire dealt with assertions about Religious Education to which the participants marked their degree of agreement (GA). Assertives "a) and g)" refer to a catechetical/confessional conception of Religious Education; assertives "e), f), and h)" refer to a more interconfessional conception of Religious Education; and assertives "b), c), d), and i)" align with a scholar and secular conception of Religious Education, in accordance with Art.33 of the LDB and the BNCC. The results are presented in Table 02.

TABLE 2: Frequency distribution of the participants teachers' answers about the degree of agreement (DA) with the statements about Religious Education.

STATEMENTS	DEGREE OF AGREEMENT (DA)					Total f (%)	Average Ranking (AR)
	TD f (%)	PD f (%)	N f (%)	PA f (%)	TA f (%)		
a) The most competent people to teach Religious Education are religious members (priests, nuns, pastors, rabbis, etc.)	16 (53,2)	7 (23,3)	4 (13,3)	2 (6,8)	1 (3,4)	30 (100,0)	1,8
b) The definition of the contents of Religious Education should be made by the Educational System, with the religious denominations only having the right to give their opinion.	7 (23,3)	7 (23,3)	4 (13,3)	5 (16,8)	7 (23,3)	30 (100,0)	2,9
c) Religious Education must ensure that students get to know the various religions, without valuing one more than the others.	3 (10,0)	7 (23,3)	2 (06,7)	3 (10,0)	15 (50,0)	30 (100,0)	3,7
d) It is possible to teach Religious Education without proselytizing my religious beliefs.	5 (16,7)	7 (23,3)	2 (06,8)	5 (16,8)	11 (36,4)	30 (100,0)	3,3
e) Religious teaching should study primarily the Christian religions because Brazil has a Christian majority.	19 (63,3)	7 (23,3)	1 (3,3)	2 (6,8)	1 (3,3)	30 (100,0)	1,6
f) The goal of Religious Education is the strengthening of students' religious faith.	12 (40,0)	7 (23,3)	5 (16,7)	4 (13,3)	2 (6,7)	30 (100,0)	2,2
g) Each teacher should teach only about his or her religion.	25 (83,34)	3 (10,00)	1 (3,3)	-	1 (3,3)	30 (100,0)	1,3
h) Religion is taught so that the student becomes more aware of its significance in his personal life and in society.	2 (6,7)	6 (20,0)	2 (6,7)	4 (13,3)	16 (53,3)	30 (100,0)	3,9
i) The school should teach Religion as well as other knowledges (History, Geography, Science, etc.)	4 (13,33)	7 (23,33)	2 (06,67)	5 (16,67)	12 (40,00)	30 (100,0)	3,5

Legend: TD (totally disagree); PD (partially disagree), N (neither disagree nor agree); PA (partially agree); TA (totally agree).

Source: prepared by the authors

Using as parameters the average rankings (AR) of the answers, with values below 3 indicating a degree of disagreement and values above 3 indicating a degree of agreement, we observed a high degree of disagreement in the statements "a" (AR = 1.8) and "g" (AR = 1.3) about the R.E. from the confessional/catechetical perspective. We also found a high degree of disagreement in assertion "e" (AR = 1.6) and moderate disagreement in "f" (AR = 2.2) about a more interconfessional/ecumenical conception of Religious Education. Item "h", however, revealed a level tending toward agreement (AR = 3.9), perhaps because the wording of the item points to an idea of human formation, which, as we saw earlier, has been a strong keynote of the teaching performance, according to their statements.

The Kruskal-Wallis test found a significant difference by "time teaching Religious Education" in the answers of the participants in item "h" of the scale ($p = 0.017$), suggesting that teachers with less time in the field agreed more about the idea that religion should be taught so that the student would be more aware of its meaning in his personal life and in society, while teachers with more time in the field tended to disagree with this statement.

The items referring to the secular conception of Religious Education, also called School Religious Education, show a tendency toward balance in the frequency of disagreement and agreement answers with the statements. In item "b", with a average ranking (AR) of 2.9, which refers to paragraph 2º of Art. 33 of LDB nº 9.394/96, changed by Law nº. 9.475/97, the participants presented an equal number of disagreements (46%) and agreements (40.1%), which corroborates the degree of ignorance about this normative by a significant part of the participants, as previously mentioned, explaining the need for a policy of continuous collaborative training among the peers and the Municipal Secretariat of Education so that the sharing of experiences, ideas, and knowledge can solve the gaps about the contents, norms, and practices around the subject. In item "c" we found a strong tendency of

agreement of the participants with the statement (AR=3.7). In item "d"(AR=3.3), there is a slight tendency of agreement with the statement, and, in "i"(MR=3.5), a stronger tendency of agreement.

These data suggest the idea that a significant part of the teachers participating in this research have a vague, intuitive and dispersed notion of the meaning of the subject in school as advocated by the BNCC, which has as its principle "welcoming of cultural identities, religious or not, in the perspective of interculturality, human rights and culture of peace" (BRASIL, 2017, p. 437).

However, most of the teachers participating in this research denote a change in perception, although diffuse, about the conception of Religious Education, which seems to be already distancing itself from its confessional past, even if stuck to an idea of interpersonal training of students and disconnected from the studies of religious knowledge. This bias is not surprising, given the ignorance of the majority about the current national guidelines on School Religious Education and, probably, about the current status of the discussion of this subject in the academic-educational environment, epistemologically supported by Religion(s) Science.

Conclusion

The study showed a series of adversities that hinder the constitution of a professional identity of "being" a Religious Education teacher among the participants and that, in the lonely professional path lived by these teachers, they make use of their pedagogical and Educational Sciences knowledge, as well as their knowledge of teaching experience, personal experiences, and some of their religious background, to try to build a practice that enables them to work in the subject.

We consider that this is one of the reasons why the change of perception does not have the necessary celerity so that the subject is

taught in accordance with what it curricularly proposes, considering that it aims to provide students with knowledge about religious, cultural and aesthetic issues, as well as reflection on freedom of conscience and manifestation of religiosity (BRASIL, 2017).

Dialogue with the school's core management, as well as closer ties with the Municipal Secretariat of Education, are urgently needed to minimize problems in the performance of teachers, such as the lack of teaching aids, the high turnover of teachers in the subject, and what the study most reveals, which is the professional helplessness of those who are, in most cases in this study, imposed to be assigned to the subject, under the justification of complementing the workload, without being qualified to do so, and without being offered any kind of in-service training. We cannot forget the warning of Gatti (2016, p.46-47) when he reminds us that "the teacher is a professional" and that it is necessary to provide him "with conditions to build philosophical and social perspectives on his performance and conditions that allow him to act effectively in schools and be creative in his work, building his professional autonomy.

We conclude these considerations understanding that the study revealed one more facet of the precariousness of the teaching work, which is the 'professional survival' of teachers who teach an undervalued subject, seen as problematic and dispensable in the scope of school management and progressive sectors in educational policies. In times of political struggles for inclusion, these sectors choose to silence the discussion of this issue in academic spaces, defending that the best solution for Religious Education is its exclusion from the school curriculum. And in this clash of forces, the precariousness of teachers' work only increases and worries, and all the school actors lose out.

In the present time marked by polarization, by the wars of narratives between the discourse of an ultraconservative and liberal extreme right-wing government and the progressive discourses that antagonize it, Religious Education must be treated in such a way that it

becomes a space of plurality and social transformation and not a reproduction of moralistic and excluding ideologies. In this sense, to form teachers reflexively to think about religion in our society is to give them conditions for a professional performance that is in line with the respect for diversity and democracy that sustain the educational process.

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