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## “There are no teachers!”: memories and teaching practices in rural areas – Caxias do Sul/RS (1930-1950)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze aspects of the practices, memories, and teaching trajectories of primary school teachers who worked in rural areas, working in the Municipal School Groups of Caxias do Sul, RS, between 1930 and 1950. To this end, the study is developed from the perspective of Cultural History, and is methodologically supported by documentary analysis of different sources, such as transcripts of interviews with teachers of the period, photographs, circulars, newspapers, documents from the Education Inspectorate and the Public Education Board of Directors of the municipality, among others. As considerations, this study allowed us to identify existing dynamics in the hiring, training, and working conditions of teachers, highlighting the feminization of teaching and the association of the figure of the teacher with care and motherhood, reinforced by social and educational discourses that legitimized the role of women in primary education. The relationship between school, community and Church is also addressed, highlighting the role of teachers in mediating religious and social practices within the school space, whose role was crucial in schooling and rural communities, operating in a context marked by tensions between social expectations and the realities of teaching.

**Keywords:** teaching; rural teacher; municipal school group; Caxias do Sul.

### 1 Introduction

The schooling process in Caxias do Sul was constituted from the arrival of the first immigrants to the territory that makes up the municipality, which is a context of elementary education, taught in confessional and ethnic schools, with the strong participation of the rural community in which these schools were inserted. The growth of the municipality, the evolution of industrialization and economy were processes that contributed to changing this context: the opening of isolated schools and confessional schools in the urban area, along with the closure of ethnic schools, and the predominance of isolated schools in the rural area of the municipality (Vanz; Dewes; Souza, 2021).

The territorial and administrative organization of Caxias do Sul encouraged schooling following a model that expanded from headquarters to other locations, and it was in the 1930s that the first school groups emerged in urban areas, which brought

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together different isolated schools to serve a greater number of students. Only in 1943, municipal school groups began to be installed in rural areas (Vanz, 2024). It is in this context, marked by schooling in rural areas, that our study is inserted.

We used as a theoretical foundation the contributions of Cultural History, in dialogue with Chartier (1990), Pesavento (2012), Le Goff (1990), among other authors. We methodologically organized this study based on historical documentary analysis, mobilized documents such as newspapers and school periodicals, photographs, faculty registration book, correspondence, school minutes and the transcription of the interviews of 3 teachers from the period, that make up the collection of the memory bank of the João Spadari Adami Municipal Historical Archive (AHMJSA) and the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute, of the University of Caxias do Sul (UCS): Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa<sup>1</sup>, Maria Cavion Rech<sup>2</sup> and Dorotéia Rizzon Corte<sup>3</sup>.

As a time frame, we situate this research between the years 1930 and 1950, which comprise a period of expansion of the municipal network of schools in rural areas. In this period, the concern with the education of the rural population was merged with the practices of nationalization of education imposed during the government of Getúlio Vargas and which particularly impacted people (subjects) from rural areas who, for the most part, were descendants of Italian immigrants.

While in the urban area the urgency of schooling was driven by economic growth and the advancement of industrialization, there was also a need to consider the specificities of the schools that served the rural population of the municipality. In this sense, the schools that were installed in these regions had to adapt to the reality of rural communities, and the teachers were critical in this process.

"There are no teachers!" – this is how the article of the newspaper A Época, of May 7, 1939 begins, marking one of the characteristics of the period: the difficulty in admitting teachers in the rural area of the city. According to the article, it was also said: "A great difficulty, however, for a long time now, has been hindering the operation and

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<sup>1</sup> The interview was conducted on October 21, 1991, by interviewer Susana Storchi Grigoletto, and is part of the João Spadari Adami Municipal Archive Oral Memory Bank archive, subject Education.

<sup>2</sup> The interview was conducted on October 7, 1989, by Zilma Rech Luciano, and is part of the archive of the Oral Memory Bank of the João Spadari Adami Municipal Archive, subject Italian Immigration. The focus of the interview was not education, so there is a short account by Maria Cavion Rech about her teaching years.

<sup>3</sup> The interview was conducted on July 1, 1986, by Professor Liane Beatriz Moretto Ribeiro, and composes the ECIRS file (Cultural Elements of Italian Immigration in the Northeast of Rio Grande do Sul).

the outbreak of new Schools in the rural area: it is the lack of teachers who are willing to serve in the rural area (colônia)". At the same time that the expansion of the municipal network was established in rural areas, there was a low interest of teachers in serving these locations.

In the proposition of Nóvoa (2012) that we adopted when focusing on teachers, the school is the place of teacher training and a space for sharing practices. Teacher training programs were formalized as components of the teaching career between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the proposal of normal schools and the theoretical and pedagogical preparation of these subjects. In Caxias do Sul, the preparation of teachers was formalized with the Complementary School, created in 1930, remaining until 1943, when it was renamed Duque de Caxias Normal School (Bergozza, 2010).

Empowering teachers is one of the discourses that permeate this research. In this sense, in the newspapers, periodicals addressed to teachers, in the newsletters and actions of the municipality, many traces were found regarding the concern to train the subjects for the teaching activity. In the newspapers, from 1939, news about teacher training began to appear more and more often, which is a constant concern of the region of Serra Gaúcha<sup>4</sup>.

"Lay teachers<sup>5</sup>" left the scene, trained teachers entered. At least this was expected. However, the reality of the period between 1930 and 1950 was somewhat distant from this ideal: for the most part, the teaching staff of municipal schools was composed of teachers appointed only with elementary education, without having attended normal school (Luchese; Grazziotin, 2015). The continuous pressure from the municipality for these teachers to be trained is identified in the announcements regarding the vacation courses and the proficiency exams, which are common in the context of the sources mobilized in this study.

From the perspective of Escolano Benito (2017), normal schools became a regularization and control device, although it was not feasible to use an explicit strategy

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<sup>4</sup> In an article in the newspaper "A Época", of October 20, 1940, there is the record of the 1st Regional Conference on Intermunicipal Cooperation, which sought to bring together the mayors of Caxias do Sul, Farroupilha, Flores da Cunha, Montenegro, Antônio Prado, Bento Gonçalves, Garibaldi, Alfredo Chaves, Prata and Guaporé, to discuss the training of teachers in the region, available at the Brazilian Digital Newspaper Library.

<sup>5</sup> Here the expression "lay" was used from the research of Luchese and Grazziotin (2015) and Weiduschadt and Amaral (2016), who consider as lay teachers those without training in teaching, who held positions in mostly rural and multigrade schools.

of teacher marginalization. However, the actions of the city hall were more subtle, massively disseminating the importance of vacation courses, making the figure of the mayor present at municipal teachers' meetings, strengthening school inspections and using newsletters as ways of reprimanding teaching behaviors considered inappropriate.

Faced with this scenario of expansion of the municipal education network and the requirements imposed on teachers, schooling in rural areas was consolidated amid structural and administrative challenges. The pressure for teacher qualification and adaptation to local realities evidenced the difficulties faced by educators who worked in rural schools. However, despite the training initiatives and the demands of the municipality, a problem persisted: the shortage of teachers to meet the growing educational demand in rural areas.

## **2 Municipal education: lack of teachers in rural areas**

The opening of more schools in the rural area of Caxias do Sul would show another problem in the educational area, which consisted of the teachers' low interest in working in these locations. Great distances, inadequate remuneration, the need to stay in the homes of community residents and the acceptance of students' families were some of the factors faced by women who followed the teacher's career. In an article in the local newspaper "A Época", of May 7, 1939, the situation is evidenced:

Several classes have not worked yet this year, because they do not have teachers who want to teach them. The city is irresistibly attractive. Candidates for the teaching profession do exist in quantity. They all seek nomination. They all want to be teachers. At the same time, however, that they express their desire, they impose a condition: to work in the city. (No [...], 1939, p. 2).

The difficulty in obtaining candidates for municipal teaching influenced the way teachers were admitted, and it was common to hire them through referrals, in which the students who stood out the most in their studies became teachers in their rural community (Dalla Vecchia; Herédia; Ramos, 1998). In the case of the continuity of studies at the Complementary School, it was common for the hiring of these teacher-students<sup>6</sup> to occur soon after their graduation. Effectively, at the beginning of the

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<sup>6</sup> Designation that indicated that the training had been done at the Complementary School (Fraga, 2013).

1930s, the competitions were a minority for the hiring of teachers, and the offer of vacancies was greater than the demand for teaching.

When they occurred, these competitions were composed of both a written and an oral evaluation, and the applicants were argued in dictation, writing, mathematics, history, geography and sciences. In the memories of teacher Dorotéia Rizzon Corte (1986) and in those of teacher Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa (1991), applicants were hired soon after their approval in elementary knowledge. According to teacher Guilhermina (Costa, 1991), the evaluation of the tests was carried out by school inspectors Firmino Bonnet and Santo Ceroni.

Despite the operation of the Complementary School, most municipal teachers did not have access, and this degree of teaching was related to teachers who worked mostly in the urban area (Luchese, 2016). And, even if there were teachers trained by the Complementary School working in municipal school groups, the number of teachers without pedagogical training was a reality in these educational institutions.

These teachers found in their context multigrade schools, with children who spoke the Italian dialect, in a reality of farming families who lived with other families in rural communities strongly influenced by the Church. Even in municipal school groups, the situation was not different; it was common for a single teacher to teach more than one grade, and another teacher taught only the first year, in which there were more students. Thus, generally, one teacher taught the first year and another one, the other grades.

The hiring of lay teachers was not only an emergency solution to fill the shortage of qualified teachers, but also a reflection of the social dynamics of rural communities. The acceptance of these teachers by the community played a crucial role in the functioning of the schools, since cultural, linguistic and social proximity favored the construction of bonds between the teacher and the students and their families. In this context, a teacher from her own locality was received better, as she shared values, habits and, often, even kinship ties with the residents. This facilitated her integration into daily school life and contributed to the permanence of children in school, reducing resistance that could arise with the arrival of an external teacher.

The increase in the demand for teachers in the municipality occurred mainly between 1945 and 1950, both with the opening of new isolated schools and with the expansion of school groups, in 1941, the number of school institutions was 74, and in

1951, this number was 97 school institutions. Regarding the number of teachers, in 1929, the municipality had 83 teachers, and in 1950, the staff was composed by 124 teachers (Dalla Vecchia; Herédia; Ramos, 1998). The concern with primary education that resulted in the expansion of vacancies for teachers throughout the state was also responsible for mobilizing strategies for the rural environment (Weiduschadt; Amaral, 2016).

An attempt to value municipal teachers was the dissemination of their appointments in local newspapers, acting as a showcase for their recognition by the community. This resource also sought to minimize possible resistance to the arrival of teachers from outside the locality, legitimizing their presence through public exposure. Announcing appointments, presenting teachers trained by the Complementary School and publicizing changes in the teaching staff were ways to strengthen the image of these practitioners and integrate new subjects into the school context. In this sense, the newspapers and journals of the time played a key role in promoting and consolidating the teaching profession.

The prestige of the teachers who graduated from the Complementary School was reinforced in the community, whose graduation celebrations were published in the newspapers of the time. In the newspaper “O Momento”, for example, articles were found that present the celebration in detail, with romanticized speeches, favored by the power relations that also surrounded the teaching profession.

Within an environment of perfume and beauty, the society of Caxias paid its praise and addressed its palms to that magnificent handful of gentle patricians who then received the desired diploma, the initial mark of their entry into the teaching profession” (Colaço [...], 1939).

The reality of the Complementary School was not for all teachers and therefore it was a form of distinction; the others, “[...] became teachers because they had the minimum knowledge required for the function and due to the absolute lack of professionals with degrees” (Luchese; Grazziotin, 2015, p. 343). In all, in 1939, 14 female teacher-students graduated. In the edition of the newspaper “O Momento”, of April 27, 1942, all 43 students who graduated are named, including the future director of Public Instruction and Municipal Education Advisor, Ester Justina Troian Benvenuti. This increase is significant, but a large part of these teachers was absorbed by state school groups. An example of this situation is that of the director of the Municipal School Group José Bonifácio, located in the rural area: the teacher- student who takes



over the school in 1943 and who is dismissed in August 1945 for having received a state appointment (Caxias do Sul, 1943).

These situations highlighted the challenges that went beyond teacher training, involving cultural, structural and social issues. The low interest in teaching in these regions was not only a matter of personal choice, but reflected a set of difficulties that made the profession unattractive outside the urban space. At the same time, the appreciation of teachers trained by the Complementary School and the visibility granted by the local press indicated attempts to raise the status of teaching and encourage adherence to municipal teaching.

These issues intensified when we consider that this profession was mostly occupied by women, whose performance in teaching was crossed by gender expectations. In the next section, we will address the relationship between the representations of these women as teachers and the discourses of care that were imposed on the role of primary education teacher.

### **3 The woman in rural teaching: between care, education and the challenge of being a teacher**

We refer, in this section, to teachers, because the figure of the teacher dissipates over the years in the records and in the traces of the documents consulted, such as newspapers, faculty registration book, correspondence and school minutes. In the early years of the municipality's formation, most public classes were taught by male teachers, and it was only from the 1930s that teachers assumed primary education, instituting aspects that reinforced the representation of teaching as a care activity, attributing the dimension of gender to professionalization.

The representation of the teacher-woman-mother as someone better suited to teaching younger children was gradually incorporated into the teaching profession, replicated by the discourses of education and care that they conveyed in that time. For Louro (2011), the strengthening of this position occurred throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, supported by the social transformations that were happening in the Brazilian scenario.

But not only the association of education and care made this change; another important factor to be considered was related to economic opportunities. The teaching scenario was largely dominated by women who saw teaching as a possibility beyond

agricultural work – and, according to Aragão and Kreutz (2011), while men migrated to other financially more attractive professions, women remained in teaching with lower salaries.

The sources we mobilized for this study corroborate this view, and in the discourses that appear, being a teacher often represented an alternative to rural work, offering a different option from life in the countryside. Professor Maria Cavion Rech reports her experience in this regard, since “staying at home” meant dividing her tasks between working on her parents' plantations and doing the housework.

I didn't want to stay at home. I cried a lot. Then my father sent me to study in the city, staying at his cousin's house. The school was called São José, it belonged to the sisters. I took the complementary course and then I wanted to graduate. [...] at the age of sixteen, I graduated. And the following week they gave me two schools, which were there in São Marcos da Linha Feijó, where my parents lived, and in São Caetano. I taught Portuguese in the morning and afternoon. (Rech, 1989, p. 3).

When analyzing the book of records of the teaching staff, we identified that even in the early 1930s, the scenario of rural primary education was dominated by the figure of the teacher. Professor Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa (1991, p. 1) says in her report that in the period in which she was a teacher (1932 - 1962), the number of women in teaching was much more significant than that of men, and she herself comments that "there were some male teachers: two or three, I even have a photograph with them". The photograph in question is a record made by the Board of Public Instruction during a meeting of the municipal professorship. Teaching was a socially accepted profession for women, associated with the extension of the maternal role to the public school space, characterizing this as one of the opportunities for female professionalization for the period (Louro, 2011). In Figure 1, we show some aspects of the feminization of teaching, reflecting the social role attributed to women as caregivers and trainers, at the same time that the main figure of control and authority, that of the School Inspector, was exercised by a man (identified in the photograph with a blue arrow).



Figure 1 – Meeting of teachers of municipal education, on the staircase of the Diocesan Cathedral (1947)



Source: individual photograph – New State Works, AHMJSA (1947)

We also point out the construction of the homogeneity of the female teaching staff, evidenced in the alignment of the teachers, in the repetition of the costumes and in the formal posture. These elements can be understood, in the light of Chartier (1990), as representations of an ideal that expresses discipline and reveals forms of control directed specifically to women in the exercise of teaching. Indicated by red arrows, there are the two male teachers who made up the teaching staff, and the requirement to wear the uniform was an aspect directed only to female teachers: "You (women) can also, since the first days of next May, look for the model for the uniform of the municipal *teachers*" (Caxias do Sul, 1943, p. 2, emphasis added).

Looking at the scenario of municipal school groups, we show this disparity between male and female teachers by comparing the number of institutions between 1943 and 1949 (Table 1). Among these numbers, we also highlight that the only male teacher who served the municipal school groups, teacher Osvaldo Velho, taught together with his wife, teacher Lurdes A. Prestes Velho, assuming the function of school principal while he was in the group.

Table 1 – List of teachers of Municipal School Groups (1943-1949)

Number of G.E.M	Number of female teachers	Number of male teachers
7	36	1

Source: The authors

In rural areas, teachers followed the profession out of a need to educate the students of the communities, without technical or pedagogical preparation. In this case, the teaching practice was confused with the influences of the family and the community itself – and one of the discourses present in the speeches of the teachers was that of teaching as something desired still in the time when they were students. In the interview with teacher Dorotéia Rizzon Corte, she reports that she started as a teacher to help the school's main teacher, at the age of 12: “I started [teaching] as a private teacher to help [teacher] Marcolina, because she had 56 students, 32 years old; I studied, still remembered Seleta, but I helped, so the parents paid me 200 réis each child” (Corte, 1986, p. 48, our translation).

Teaching was a possible path for these women, but not without stigma, as teacher Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa reports about her father not being in favor of her choice of teaching, “because he said that teachers died spinsters and poor. At the time, most of the teachers were not married; almost all of them were single” (Costa, 1991, p. 28). When married, many teachers end up giving up teaching to have more time for the family; others continued teaching as a way to increase income. Teacher Maria Cavion Rech continued to teach in two rural schools after her marriage, while her husband worked as a farmer.

He planted a little bit of everything on the farm. [...] It didn't give much [money], but we could live, and with my [salary] from school I could put it together until we built a house on a plot of land that we also bought; it was eight hectares, it was close to the chapel. (Rech, 1989, p. 4).

In addition to marriage, motherhood was also an object of concern for these women, and one of the realities identified in the documents analyzed is that many teachers needed to take their young children along while working in schools, resulting even in a communication from the Board of Public Instruction, warning about this fact.

We suggest that married teachers do their best not to take their young children to class, as the natural development of the work may be impaired, despite the teacher's goodwill. We made this remark quite reluctantly, understanding the situation many find themselves in. However, the interest of teaching is above the particular interest of each one. (Caxias do Sul, 1951).

The lack of a support network for these women highlights the lack of an adequate institutionalized structure to assist with early childhood care in rural areas. The first records of kindergarten in municipal school groups occur only in 1953, and before this period, these women needed to ask relatives for help to take care of young children, or abandon the teaching career.

Teachers were expected to be dedicated to the profession, but in practice, there was often no institutional support, especially when it came to motherhood. In the interview with Professor Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, there is a passage that exemplifies this question:

I had a baby, I was entitled to three months; my leave was for eight days, a week! [...] [...] Because there was (...) no one to replace me; there was no one to replace me at school. And it was in June that I had my son, and I thought that children going three months without classes would be greatly harmed, because soon after they would have a vacation, right? They were going to be impaired, and as the school was next to my house, I kept teaching. (Costa, 1991, p. 4).

With the help of a younger sister to take care of her son, teacher Guilhermina continued to teach even though her three-month leave was provided for by law. Teacher responsibilities reflected a pressure to reconcile the role of educator with the requirement of being a mother. The difficulty in finding substitutes in the rural context corroborated the teacher's decision, illustrating the complex relationship between motherhood and teaching.

Representations of motherhood in the teaching profession were carried in the discourse that appeared in the Newsletters, in the newspapers, in the memories of the teachers. Discourses in which the personal and professional lives of teachers were mixed were common, incorporating characteristics attributed to the role of mothers to teachers, in the form of self-denial, love and dedication. In an excerpt from the "Teacher's prayer", published in the newsletter "Despertar" of 1951, it reads:

Lord, give me therefore that you have made me a teacher, that my love, the love you give to all creatures, be my school, to love and honor it every minute of my life and that my students be my children, flesh of my soul, as much or more than the flesh of the flesh. (Oração [...], 1951, p. 1).

The circulation of representation about the good teacher in rural communities was invaded by that of the good mother: in addition to teaching practices, these women should also take care of good manners, in a perspective not only of instructing, but

also of educating the children who attended school. The teacher's performance went beyond formal teaching, incorporating moral and affective responsibilities that brought her closer to the ideal mother, creating representations of women who were both educators and caregivers.

This tension between professional and personal life often impacted on the teachers' decisions to continue to exercise their profession, and the request for dismissal after marriage is common, as stated in the "Book of Teachers' Records" whose teacher "stopped teaching in this Group because she got married on April 26, 1956". Often, exonerations due to marriage were also announced in the school newspaper "Despertar", showing that power relations involving the female figure also considered the role of these women as wives. In this sense, constant changes in the staff of teachers assigned to schools in rural areas were common, from dismissals and layoffs to the constant change of school, with marriage being one of the main factors for teachers to be transferred from one rural location to another.

Among the structural and social challenges faced by teachers, the representation of women as caregivers also lasted in the educational field, challenging these women to shape their professional trajectories within the limitations imposed. The continuous adaptation of teachers to the role of mother and educator reflects the resistance of these women to reconcile their personal and professional lives, a balance that sometimes affected their decisions to stay or abandon the profession and also their own professional qualification.

### **3 Preparing teachers:** the improvement courses and proficiency exams

The representations of a good teacher went beyond knowledge: "a good teacher must truly love her students and feel pleasure in being in contact with them, at school, on the street, in the breaks [...]" (Deveres [...], 1950, p. 2), was what instructed the newspaper "Despertar", of October 1950, in the section "Educação e Ensino". The good teacher was the one who fulfilled her duty as a teacher in addition to other duties; who preserved the traditions of the community and good customs; who fulfilled the role of instructing and educating with the zeal of a mother, but with a firm pulse; the one capable of imposing order and discipline on students; the one who contributed to the activities of the community; the one who participated in moments of socialization and assumed the role of friend of all; was the one who served as inspiration for children.

However, even with this construction of an exemplary figure, her authority as an educator was often questioned.

There was doubt on the part of some spectrums of society and authorities regarding the intellectual capacity of municipal teachers, who are often considered caregivers and not educators. However, even with a discourse that in some instances marginalized the legitimacy of their knowledge, these teachers developed from their own experience as teachers, keeping municipal schools operating in rural areas, seeking to improve in the ways that were possible for them. For Escolano Benito (2017, p. 49), “[...] in this struggle for pedagogical power, practical teachers were labeled with adjectives as pejorative and devalued as ‘ignorant’, ‘routine’, ‘improvisers’, ‘incompetent’”.

Seeking the improvement of the municipal teaching staff, Act No. 71, of February 20, 1939, was created with the establishment of the "Commission for examinations of proficiency of municipal teachers", to which applicants for municipal teachers were submitted as, well as, teachers who exercised the teaching profession without having previously taken the exam or attended the Complementary School. The examination of proficiency was the guarantee for the entrance and definitive exercise in the municipal teaching.

In the first years after the commission became official, the indexes of the municipal teachers' proficiency exams remained low; in 1942, it was announced in the newspaper “O Momento” that of the 33 applicants who took the proficiency exam, only 6 were approved (Aprovação [...], 1942); in 1948, in the Teaching Inspectorate Report, it is described that of the 16 teachers who took the exam, only 6 were approved (Caxias do Sul, 1948).

In this scenario, one of the proposals adopted by the municipality to mitigate the problems caused by the lack of preparation of the teachers were the improvement courses, taught by one or more teachers who were linked to the Complementary School, addressing theoretical and practical pedagogical proposals. In July 1941, a course taught by the then director of the Complementary School, Rosalba Hipólito, took place in the municipality, being published in the newspaper "A Época", of July 20, 1941. The teachers of the municipal schools gathered in the Hall of Honor of the City Hall in a group of twenty, receiving lectures from Mayor Dante Marcucci.



In these courses, in addition to the classes, the teachers carried out several activities that sought to bring them closer to a more specific knowledge with daily life, and visits to industrial establishments and public buildings were part of the program, which had a special focus on the development of knowledge in the Portuguese language and mathematics. As these courses usually took place between January and February, they came to be known as holiday courses.

These courses were part of the set of actions between the municipality and the state in favor of the specialization of municipal teachers, who still had orientation meetings, the creation of the journal “Awake” and the teachers' Circulating Library. Such initiatives showed an effort to improve teacher training, providing access to new pedagogical methods and encouraging the exchange of experiences, while reinforcing the link between teachers and the educational guidelines established by public agencies (Figure 2).

Figure 2 – Group of teachers in the 1950 Vacation Course



Source: page 23 of the Photographic Album of Municipal Education of Caxias do Sul 1948-1951, AHMJSA (1950)

In this photograph, it is possible to identify the group of teachers during the 1950 course, indicating the consolidation of the female presence in the municipal teaching. This female presence already appears naturalized, and at no time in the teachers' interviews, or in the correspondence issued by the Board of Public Instruction, is there any questioning about the absence of men. Municipal primary education was seen and



understood as a space culturally identified as female (Louro, 2011). The teachers, by occupying this space, built networks and collective identities that served as social representations of the teaching work.

In addition to the proposal for permanent training of teachers, Figure 2 can also be read as a record of sociability among women teachers, contributing to the construction of a school culture that carried specific aspects of female teaching. The orientation meetings became memorable for the teachers; in the memories of Professor Guilhermina: "Every year there was a date. So, this meeting was not only from the First District, it was with the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Vila Oliva, Santa Lúcia do Piaí, Vila Seca [...]" (Costa, 1991, p. 22). In these guidelines, activities were developed such as reviewing the instructions on the school year, commenting on the results of the final exams, warnings and observations on verified deficiencies, drawing of reading prizes for the teachers who most withdrew books from the teachers' Circulating Library, meetings with the teachers of the supplementary courses, conservation of school buildings, course of proficiency, referral of lesson plans, statistical bulletins and children's collaborations for the journal "Despertar".

In line with the orientation meetings, the Circulating Library was one of the strategies to encourage teachers to acquire repertoire through specialized readings, improving their spelling. One of the clashes between the Inspectorate of Education and the municipal teachers was the care with spelling errors, since most of these women were of Italian descent, and the use of dialect was common in their daily lives. In the Newsletter sent to the teachers on July 14, 1941, this relationship is evident, and the guidelines of the School Inspector were as follows: "Inside and outside the school, the teacher will make her authority felt, talking to the students in our language, and not allowing another language or dialect to prevail among them" (Caxias do Sul, 1941). The inspection of the School Inspector took place in order to monitor and guide the teachers on the correct use of the Portuguese language, and the inspection visits and end-of-year evaluations were the main moments when there was this charge (Corte, 1986).

In this sense, the use of the Circulating Library was a way to encourage teachers to exercise the reading and writing of the Portuguese language from works selected by the authorities. In the Circulating Library, didactic, literary works and specialized magazines were made available, including the "Revista do Ensino" and the magazines

of "Applied Arts" (Caxias do Sul, 1951). The teachers' Circulating Library was created in March 1944 and registered with the National Book Institute, initially with 48 volumes; after 4 years of operation, the Library already had more than 1,000 volumes, and the main subjects of interest to the teachers were "literature in general, followed by history and pedagogy" (Biblioteca [...], 1948, p. 9).

As another component of the improvement strategy, the creation of the journal "Despertar" was a way to convey instructions and guidance among teachers on activities, behaviors and contents to be addressed. Unlike other pedagogical journals, "Despertar" was not aimed exclusively at teachers, being directed to the entire rural community; within the volumes made available monthly, there was a section that dealt with school matters, called "Educação e Ensino". In this way, the guidelines that were conveyed reached all families of students, with specific sections for each audience<sup>7</sup>.

"Despertar" functioned as an object of assistance to teaching practice, and the guidelines present there were aimed at pedagogical improvement. In the first years of its production, the section "Education and Teaching" was presented as a communication channel and a way to remind teachers about the public guidelines for the organization and maintenance of the school, including the list of times, furniture, evaluations and school documentation, reinforcing what was formally sent through newsletters.

Despite all the actions developed by the city hall, the working conditions of the teachers were still, for the most part, inadequate. The teachers continued to be underpaid and the travelling to isolated schools or school groups farther from the urban area was costly. It was common for teachers to find themselves in a situation of overcrowding, serving more students than was possible, as we identified in the requests and correspondence analyzed, as in the correspondence issued by Professor Flora Postali Rizzardi, on May 15, 1936: "the enrollment is already high at 100 students, an impossible number for a single teacher". To which, in response to the School Inspector, she receives the refusal of new hires: "Keep in mind, however, that this year, absolutely, no new teachers will be nominated, as we have already exhausted the amount allocated to public instruction" (Caxias do Sul, 1936).

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<sup>7</sup> In the Report of the technical and administrative work of the Inspectorate of Education (Caxias do Sul, 1948), the sections of "Despertar" are presented as follows: News; Education and Teaching; Advice on agriculture; Collaboration and goodwill; Hygiene; Useful advice; Household recipes; For you, child; News and Newsletter.

If on the one hand there was the charge of the city hall for teacher improvement, on the other hand there was a long way to an ideal scenario of working conditions, and the community itself and religious figures manifested in support of the teachers. The reality of teaching imposed challenges that went beyond formal training, and required constant adaptations of these teachers who developed practices trying to conceal institutional guidelines with the demands of rural schools.

#### **4 Memory of teaching practices**

Resignifying their experiences as students (whether in Complementary education or only in Elementary), the learning in the courses provided by the city hall and their own experience as teachers, each teacher incorporated into their practices the new knowledge acquired, and this did not always correspond to what was desired by the power of the municipality or the state. The memories of the teachers and the other documents analyzed in this research reveal the importance of the position of these teachers for rural schools and their respective communities. The educational discourses of the time and the reality that these women experienced diverged in several aspects, showing the difficulties of the profession in rural areas, either due to material precariousness or professional opportunities.

In the memories, in silencing, there is an account of individual , but also collective experiences; for the teachers, teaching left marks, both in the subjects and in the dynamics of the community itself. The school welcomed families, in order to strengthen bonds and give importance to education for children. For teacher Dorotéia Rizzon Corte, “their [parents’] greatest joy was to see their son recite poetry, or perform a short scene. They felt fulfilled” (Corte, 1986, p. 61). In the memories of teacher Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, the relationship of affection with the students was an important aspect: “I liked them, I liked my students a lot, and they liked me too” (Costa, 1991, p. 24).

Being a teacher in rural areas went beyond the classroom, and was also based on experiences with rural communities, in line with the local church. The teacher represented a transition between the habits of the communities and access to different knowledge from that of the rural area (colônia). In this same sense, teachers assumed an important role, together with the Church, in the proposal to nationalize teaching,

fostering the use of the Portuguese language, considering most families had the Italian dialect as their main way of communicating.

It was not enough to just teach students, it was important that these women also served as counselors within the community, taking on religious teaching, participating effectively in festive activities, collaborating with families, teaching about hygiene, health, agriculture, sex and menstruation. In the memories of teacher Dorotéia, it was not only the children she had instructed, but also the mothers – in one of the passages of the interview, the teacher says that she was approached by the mothers because she was teaching about menstruation and how children were born:

Then the other day there were 4 mothers there, they said they were angry, they were going to beat me, and they were going to talk to the priest. Because I was teaching children terrible things, and not instructing them. I said: and if you want on Tuesday next week, you are invited to come to attend a class that I teach. [...] Then, the next week, about 5, 6 [mothers] came and sat right at the back. Then I explained why they got their periods, why we get pregnant, how children were born. Suddenly, I look down, all the mothers were crying. [...] Crying because they said they didn't even know. Then they came to hug me and thank me. (Corte, 1986, p. 103-104).

As guides for the community, the teachers also found their clashes with the subjects, and often these frictions occurred due to the expectation that families had in relation to teaching. This fine line between school and community ended up bringing into the school routine subjects that were part of the activities of the rural community, such as knowledge of agriculture and religious teaching, the latter, leading the school to maintain a close relationship with the church. The teachers ended up getting involved with activities such as catechesis, in collaboration with the community priests, and were responsible for praying the rosary with the community, preparing the children for First Communion, organizing the processions and getting involved in the community festivals. In the memories of Professor Guilhermina:

In my school, they all followed the Catholic Religion, because religion is my religion, isn't it? The religion that we had the obligation to give, which was in the municipal education program, it had religion. Even in the Getúlio government, religion was one of the contents of the program, we were obliged to teach religion. (Costa, 1991, p. 13).

Teachers were subjects who formalized religious practices in the daily lives of the children, making the school a space that included both the precepts of a so-called modern education and the habits and traditions of Catholicism, with the approval of the students' families. Professor Dorotéia (Corte, 1986, p. 46) also remembered that the

“community, families really wanted religion to be taught [...]. Even the teachers later prepared the classes and took them to the priest, who examined them (for First Communion).”

When educating children in Portuguese, the teachers assumed an importance both for the government in the actions of nationalization of teaching and for the Church, since, by obligation, the masses could only be said in Portuguese. In this sense, the role of teachers was to mediate between state guidelines and the reality of communities, strengthening the use of Portuguese in public and religious spaces.

Care with everyday matters, which were relevant to the children, was also a constant in the teachers' reports. Even in the books used, it was common for them to select the most significant problems for the rural reality. In this sense, a practice of teacher Dorotéia was to choose textbook activities that used a language that was well understood in rural areas, related to the community, allowing children to acquire autonomy in their daily activities.

How many sacks of wheat was 60 kg, if I sold 15 kg, how much I earned, if I sold a dozen eggs, how much I earned. The whole problem, in relation to his own life. Considering grapes, how many kilos it took to make a liter of wine. It was all based on what was inside him. (Corte, 1986, p. 92).

Teachers sought to work with Portuguese and Mathematics every day with their students, seeking to integrate the knowledge of the disciplines with reality. The teacher's concern was to observe the evolution of student learning, to correct, and gradually introduce other activities. Thus, it was extremely favorable for teachers to include in their activities collective and individual games, role plays, school fair and bazaar projects, visits and excursions, and activities that simulated real-life components.

Another strategy adopted by the teachers as a way to teach the Portuguese language was through school songs. The National Anthem and the Anthem of the Flag were the main songs rehearsed by the classes, preceded by songs, some lullabies and other patriotic songs, preferably using Brazilian authors as reference figures. As Professor Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa recalled,

We sang the National Anthem, the Flag Anthem, this was weekly [...]. We sang the Hymn to the Republic, the Riograndense Hymn [...], all these hymns we sang, Luar do Sertão Then there are other country songs as well. I had a little book with all these songs. (Costa, 1991, p. 13).

According to teacher Dorotéia Rizzon Corte (1986, p. 48), the students “[...] sang in class, or at break time, in a circle, we made the circle and sang”. By bringing the songs closer to the students' daily lives, the messages were more effective, as they disseminated a proposal for popular patriotic culture (Escolano Benito, 2021, p. 91). The songs prescribed certain behaviors, emphasized characteristics that the regime considered ideal, strengthened the positive view of the study, the homeland, the family and traditions, pointed out religious feelings that should be followed and exalted figures who could assume the role of heroes.

Seeking to diversify pedagogical practices, teachers also worked with activities beyond the classroom, and the school excursion was a way to enable children to experience in real life the contents learned in the classroom (Vidal, 2000). In the memories of teacher Guilhermina, the excursions used to be in the rural areas of the municipality, including locations in other schools. For example,

São Marcos, we went to São Marcos da Linha Feijó, we went on a tour in a year also, in São Caetano. We went to these places, where there were other schools [...]. We were going to spend all day outside, each one carrying their lunchbox in a bag. (Costa, 1991, p. 22).

In addition to excursions, which provided a direct connection between learning and the territory lived, other spaces in the school also played an essential role in the educational experience of children. The schoolyard, for example, was an environment of socialization and movement, where recreational practices and school gymnastics were integrated into daily life, enabling interactions that went beyond the strict discipline of the classroom.

In the words of teacher Dorotéia (Corte, 1986, p. 85), "In general they always had a large yard, or there was a street that passed right in front of them so they widened a lot for us at break time to play with the children". It was in this courtyard that the recreational activities took place and also the gymnastic activities. This was the moment when, even under the supervision of the teacher, the children could be subjected to a different sentimental construction from that proposed by the classroom. In the memories of Professor Dorotéia,

We had to have a break at 10.20. So, we played, the classes were divided. When there was more than one teacher, then, each one took care of a class. [...] We received a notice, so that there was no fight, there was no someone who made others trip to fall to the ground. So, the teacher always had to be



near the children. [...] She played with the them. They played circle games, and other traditional ones as hide and seek, hunter, and so on There was another one... João Calça Branca, how many breads are in the oven? 25 are burnt, so they went underneath, and made like a chain. So we divided so that the group would not be too large. (Corte, 1986, p. 102).

It is not difficult to imagine the scene of children and teachers together, where the time and space of school discipline are replaced by moments of fun and spontaneity. This dimension of school times, to which schedules and calendars belong, is incorporated into school culture from a look at the organization of the school and educational structures, such as working time in the classroom, break time, extra-school time and leisure time (Escolano Benito, 2021). According to Escolano Benito (2021, p. 79), "The chronologies of the school constituted an overlapping culture, to which the psychophysical structures of childhood, including emotional ones, will have to adjust".

In the "chronoculture" of the school, as Escolano Benito (2021) points out, there was also time for surveillance and control to be softened and replaced by childhood processes – even if this meant impasses and disagreements, making the teacher still needed to be present. This interval in the break time was called "Repair Time", being mandatory in all educational establishments, as well as the teacher's supervision (Caxias do Sul, 1945). It was a period for outdoor activities and for the exercise of the children's collectivity, and could not be private, nor as a form of punishment.

In the memories of teacher Dorotéia and teacher Guilhermina, the punishments in their teaching days were to have students copy lines of texts. Teacher Guilhermina stated that

As a punishment, I gave a lot of punishment lines. "I must be obedient"; "I must obey"; "I must do my homework", if they did not do their homework. Many did not, they did not do their homework, not all did, most did, but there is always one or the other that does not. So they did it at the time of correction. (Costa, 1991, p. 18).

Teacher Dorotéia (Corte, 1986, p. 60) also reported the following practice: "Sometimes, when they didn't study and did not know what they were supposed to, then they would write eight lines of copy, make their mother sign. [...] it was the punishment I gave". This was a very different scenario from the one that teachers recalled in their time as students, when more severe physical punishment practices were used, as spanking paddle, ruler and wicker to inflict physical harm on students.

Teacher Guilhermina confesses, however, that in very specific cases, of students who fled the classroom or who presented very rebellious behaviors, she appealed to physical punishments that she considered more severe.

I used it a few times, scared them, like this. Because they ran away from the classroom, while I was writing on the blackboard. [...] I would punish him, put him on his knees next to me, but not with corn underneath, with nothing, but put him on his knees, in front of everyone there. He would stay there half an hour on his knees, then goes to his place to work. (Costa, 1991, p. 19)

From the perspective of Escolano Benito (2021), the triad of surveillance, punishment and gratification are part of the institutional discipline, being devices of the academic order – and in many ways, used as a form of child training. Punishments were used at home, and were also often understood as necessary at school, considering the relationship that was intended to strengthen the school as a second home.

The teachers' narratives reveal a complex network of relationships between the school, the community, and the authorities, where the teaching in the rural environment exceeded the limits of the classroom. By playing multiple roles, such as educators, counselors, and cultural mediators, teachers were deeply embedded in the social and religious dynamics of families. School education, in this context, was not limited to formal education, but encompassed aspects of daily life, from hygiene care to religious practices, reflecting the teachers' commitment to children and the community itself. This multifaceted performance and the difficulties that arose, such as the tensions between the expectations of the state and the needs of families, show the constant challenge of teachers in balancing educational ideals with rural reality.

## **5 Final considerations**

Considered agents of the nationalization of education against illiteracy, through the sources mobilized for this study, we observed that teachers sought opportunities to improve their practices in the classroom, either through the improvement courses offered by the municipality, in teacher training colleges or in a self-taught way. There was pressure from the authorities for the teachers to serve as an example for the students, in terms of discipline, order, attendance: "It takes a lot of rigor on the part of the teachers, in order to educate through their example for the student himself to fulfill his obligations" (Caxias do Sul, 1949).

Among the different tensions and disputes, in the documentary analysis, the different strategies adopted by the Inspectorate of Education to train the teachers of the municipality are evident, at the same time that they lacked adequate working conditions. In the reports preserved by the interview transcripts, the motivations for these women to become teachers were different, and their paths and life stories were also different.

When observing the record book of the teaching staff, we observed the dynamics that occurred in relation to the career of these women, who often migrated to other schools, were transferred to locations closer to their families, chose to abandon the profession after marriage, followed a career in state schools, worked together with their husbands. These were the realities of those who made up the teaching staff of the municipality, and they talk a lot about the role of these women, who moved between teacher-mother-daughter-wife.

Often without further training, these teachers were pressured to participate in vacation and training courses that sought to address teaching deficiencies, responding to the context of school openings in rural areas. In the task of literacy, the teachers articulated the actions together with the Church and the community itself, helping in cultural and linguistic adaptation by promoting the use of Portuguese in areas where the Italian dialect still predominated. In this sense, I point out that teachers were important for the dynamics in rural communities, strengthening the positive vision of education among students' families. Thus, the multidimensional role of these women also reverberated in the representations they assumed before the other subjects: they were counselors, assumed responsibility for religious education, participated in activities at community festivals, talked about health, hygiene, agriculture, among other subjects.

The role that these women played in the formation and development of the rural communities in which they worked reaffirms the relevance of their legacy in the educational transformations of the period studied. As part of a movement to strengthen and preserve local identity and belonging, rural teachers were significant in the process of constituting rural primary education in Caxias do Sul.

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