

Memories of lay teachers who worked in rural education in the region of Italian immigration in Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil^I

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Abstract

This text aims at understanding everyday life in a rural school between 1930 and 1950 through the memories of teachers who worked in Região Colonial Italiana (RCI - region of Italian immigration) in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil. We understand that RCI is the region of the old colonies Conde d'Eu, Dona Isabel, and Caxias, which today are Caxias do Sul, Garibaldi, Carlos Barbosa, and Bento Gonçalves municipalities. This region was occupied, from 1875 on, by immigrants, predominantly Italian ones. In the period under study, 1930 to 1950, we emphasize the expansion of the public school system and the nationalization actions carried out by Vargas government. As for theoretical framework, we draw on contributions from Cultural History. For methodology, we use Historic Documental Analysis and Oral History. The documents produced from teachers' narratives belong to two collections: the memory bank of Arquivo Histórico Municipal João Spadari Adami (AHMJSA - João Spadari Adami Municipal Historical Archive) and Instituto Memória Histórica e Cultural (Historical and Cultural Memory Institute), which is kept by Universidade de Caxias do Sul. To the oral collections, we have added many documents from municipalities and administrative organs of education. We narrate teachers' stories of life, who are mostly women who became teachers because they had the minimum knowledge required for the job and due to an absolute lack of qualified teachers. Their experiences in isolated rural schools allow us to (re)construct everyday life, aspects of communitarian life, and specially school life. These lay teachers have told us about how they organized their classes, what they taught, how they proceeded in heterogeneous classes. They also talked about their relationship with students and their families, which are, therefore, aspects of the school culture of these rural isolated classes, which mark the history of education.

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Keywords

Memories - Lay teachers - Rural education - School practices.

Memórias de docentes leigas que atuaram no ensino rural da Região Colonial Italiana, Rio Grande do Sul (1930 - 1950)^I

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Resumo

O presente texto tem por objetivo compreender o cotidiano escolar rural, entre as décadas de 1930 e 1950, por meio das memórias de professores que atuaram na Região Colonial Italiana do Rio Grande do Sul (RCI), Brasil. Compreendemos a RCI como aquela formada pelas antigas colônias Conde d'Eu, Dona Isabel e Caxias, atualmente municípios de Caxias do Sul, Garibaldi, Carlos Barbosa e Bento Gonçalves. Trata-se da região que foi ocupada, a partir de 1875, por imigrantes, predominantemente italianos. No recorte temporal, 1930 a 1950, destacamos a expansão da rede escolar pública e as práticas de nacionalização empreendidas pelo governo varguista. Utilizamos como referencial teórico as contribuições da história cultural e como metodologia a análise documental histórica e a história oral. Os documentos produzidos a partir das narrativas docentes pertencem a dois acervos: banco de memórias do Arquivo Histórico Municipal João Spadari Adami (AHMJSA) e Instituto Memória Histórica e Cultural, mantido pela Universidade de Caxias do Sul. Acrescemos aos acervos orais diversos documentos das intendências e órgãos administrativos da educação. Narramos histórias de vida dos docentes, mulheres em sua maioria, que se tornaram professoras por terem os conhecimentos mínimos exigidos para a função e pela absoluta falta de profissionais com titulação. Suas experiências vividas em escolas isoladas, rurais, permitem-nos (re)construir cotidianos, aspectos da vida comunitária e, especialmente, escolar. Essas professoras leigas contaram como organizavam suas aulas, o que ensinavam, o modo como procediam em turmas heterogêneas, a relação delas com alunos e familiares, que são, portanto, aspectos da cultura escolar dessas aulas isoladas rurais, que marcam a história da educação brasileira.

Palavras-chave

Memórias – Docentes leigas – Ensino rural – Práticas escolares.

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"By adjusting their incomes more suitably [...] so they can live with the necessary appropriateness, we shall lead these modest employees of the Nation to perform their patriotic mission, with dedication and kindness, as it is much required."
(Superintendent Thomaz B. de Queiroz, 1929).

Initial considerations

The opening epigraph refers to the representation¹ that local authorities – here, the superintendent – shared about the teaching work in the interior of Rio Grande do Sul in the late 1920's. It recognized the low wages and praised the romantic view of the teaching mission as an apostolate to the nation. Beyond political enunciations about schools, and in order to narrate their daily life, this text analyses memories of rural teachers from the Italian Settlement Region (RCI) of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, as well as documents of the period.

We consider RCI as the region formed by the old settlements occupied since 1875 by immigrants, predominantly from Italy, and formed by the Colonias of Conde d'Eu, Dona Isabel, and Caxias. These settlements in Serra Gaúcha correspond to the current municipalities of Garibaldi, Carlos Barbosa, Farroupilha, Bento Gonçalves, Monte Belo do Sul, Santa Tereza, Caxias do Sul, Flores da Cunha, São Marcos, among others.

The time period studied ranges from 1930 to 1950, an important period in terms of the expansion of the public school system and the practices of nationalization undertaken by the Getulio Vargas administration, which produced diverse effects on a local level, particularly since 1942. We used the contributions of cultural history as our theoretical basis, and historical document analysis² and oral history³ as our methodology.

1- The concept of representation is understood here as "incorporated intellectual schemes that create figures through language, and in virtue of which the present can acquire sense, the other can become intelligible, and the space can be deciphered" (CHARTIER, 1988, p. 17). Therefore, representations are the senses and meanings that are shared and attributed by a group to the real.

2- We understand historical document analysis based on what is discussed by LE GOFF (1996), PESAVENTO (2004) and LUCHESE (2014).

3- For bibliography on oral history, refer to FERREIRA and AMADO (1996), GRAZZIOTIN and ALMEIDA (2012).

We analyzed twelve interviews with teachers who worked during that period, focusing on their training, their beginning in teaching, and their school practices. The documents produced by the interviews integrate two collections: the João Spadari Adami Municipal Historical Archive (AHMJSA) Memory Base and the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute, sponsored by the Caxias do Sul University. We chose to italicize the passages where the interviews' literal narratives are transcribed. In addition, we crossed the narratives with other documents such as: minute books, norms, memoranda, notebooks, and photographs, thus establishing connections between the remembered/experienced and the kept/documented.

These are the life stories of persons, mostly women, who became teachers due to having the minimum knowledge required for the function, and to the total lack of certified teachers. They recount their experiences in isolated rural schools, allowing us to (re)build the daily life of school education and other aspects of life in those communities. These lay teachers tell us about how they organized their classes, what they taught, the way they proceeded with heterogeneous classes, their relations with students and their families, all of which allows some visibility of those isolated rural classes' school culture.

Therefore, as Grazziotin and Almeida (2012, p.30) affirm:

[...] these narratives are part of a collective memory whose bonds are constituted by people's age and their belonging to a certain community, and the thread that binds memories together are the memories about education in a certain social, geographic space.

The analysis of lay teachers in RCI during the studied period determines a differentiated view of the history of education in RCI, as it brings in the filter of what was experienced,

rather than the legal element, thus forming what Certeau calls 'tactics', understood as day-to-day practices which "do not have [...] the possibility of giving themselves a global project nor completing [...] a distinct, visible, and objectionable space" (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 100).

Teachers, and even municipal administration levels, use their cunning to re-appropriate and subvert strategies⁴ imposed as regulations, laws, and decrees on national and state levels. Therefore, from the history that comes out of a collection of memories, thus formed by remembrance and forgetting, a recreated space emerges that allows understanding rural schools' daily life and the life stories of teachers.

Career beginning in rural schools

We know that, among those immigrants, the teacher was the person who stood out in a community of families for having a greater knowledge. It is important to stress that often they had been students during childhood and, in adolescence, eventually took over as teachers. The situation was an alternative to agriculture work and, above all, an accepted and recognized possibility of work for women. Corsetti (1998, p. 368) corroborates this when he affirms that:

[...] in the settlement areas, the emergence of public class teachers was connected, according to all indications, to the process occurring in those regions [...] related to an insufficiency of lands to support the families, which tended to grow over time in those areas. The division of lands through inheritance and the high prices of lots prompted, on the one hand, a movement of Italian immigrants towards western Paraná and Santa Catarina, who went spontaneously after better prices and better-quality lands in areas still open

4- Understood in Michel de Certeau's view as "[...] a place capable of serving as one's basis, and therefore capable of serving as a basis for managing one's relations with a distinct exterior" (CERTEAU, 1994, p. 46).

to settlement. On the other hand, part of this population started to dedicate to other activities unrelated to land work, as occurred with teachers in those regions.

Of these teachers, many were marked by the experience of immigration, the different pronunciation of Portuguese words, the tastes and costumes in terms of food, religion, clothing, physical appearance, attitudes, and behavior, which were culturally similar to their students, but, during those times of Vargasista nationalization, were not welcome.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, teacher designation in RCI did not follow any preset criteria. Those hired after specific tests were a minority, particularly in rural areas. Many designations were made by appointment of the families themselves, by the disposition of a few applicants to take the position, or even by political relations. One's qualifications, school knowledge, availability, proximity to classes' location, among others, were taken into consideration. But the decision to designate was subject to the Superintendent's approval, or the approval of his subordinate, school inspectors, or, starting in 1906, the School Council president.

Applicants were submitted to the dictation of a short text, a calculation test, and an oral questioning about a few facts of Brazilian history and geography. The knowledge required from those young applicants was only what was considered necessary to be transmitted to students in those isolated rural schools. None of them had any specific training as they started off as teachers. In the requests to start schools, many teaching positions were initially filled by appointments of families who knew – or so they thought – someone qualified. It is worth considering that communities constantly tried to determine who the teacher would be. Moreover, those who stood out in elementary education and wished to become a teacher were normally accepted, as long as they knew the minimum of mathematics and spoke Portuguese. It is worth

highlighting the early age at which many young females started teaching.

Guilhermina⁵ started teaching in March 1932, after passing an official test. She recounts that the test was “*both written and oral. [...] I took that test in December, and soon, on the 1st of March, I was designated. Colonel Muratore was the mayor then [...]*” (COSTA, 1991). She also recalled that, by then, many women were taking the test for a teaching position, and according to her, there were many vacancies, and they were only required to have finished primary education in order to qualify for application. Few teachers had finished secondary education by the early 1930's. Therefore, most were lay teachers.

Once designated, Guilhermina took over an isolated class in the community of Guarani. After three years, she got married and started teaching in the community of Desvio Rizzo. On the latter, she recalls:

[...] my father, he bought a few boards, made the benches, made the blackboard, and even, so we could start enrolment, he lent his own living room; the house was large, there was this large living room, with those huge tables [...] (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

Guilhermina recalls that she taught at her parents' living room for a few months, and then rented a house that belonged to José and Vitória Dani. The school building was later finished.

When asked about her choice for teaching, Guilhermina affirms that, since childhood she had a desire to study and become a teacher. She loved to read, and each piece of paper she could find as a little girl, she collected and read it. “I really enjoyed reading”, she stressed. She also recounted:

5– Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa was born on June 18, 1911, in Desvio Rizzo, in the municipality of Caxias do Sul, RS, to Pedro and Paulina Lora Poloni.

[...] my father wouldn't let me study. [...] He used to say teachers died spinsters and poor. Those days, teachers, few of them were married; nearly all of them were single. (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

She affirms that her first teacher, Vitória Grossi, played a determinant role in her becoming a teacher. She believed that Guilhermina had an ‘aptitude’ for being a teacher. There came a day when she went to visit Ghilhermina's parents and, on that occasion, she eventually convinced her father, particularly, who authorized her to start working. As Lopes (1991) and Almeida (1998) have already analyzed, the gender dimension is relevant for thinking the trajectory of teaching professionalization. Although we do not intend to examine further the subject, it is worth remembering that

[...] teaching children appeared very suitable to woman's role as the regenerator of society and savior of the nation, and it became acceptable, in social, family, and personal terms, for a woman to work as a teacher.” (ALMEIDA, 1998, p. 33).

Olga Ramos Brentano was born on June 19, 1917, in Porto Alegre. Her parents were Maria Márcia de Oliveira and Silvério Ramos de Oliveira. At the time of the interview, she had been living for 52 years in Farroupilha. She had worked as a teacher in the municipalities of Caxias do Sul and Farroupilha. When asked about her reasons for becoming a teacher, she affirmed:

I chose it then and I still do; I think I was born a teacher. I had a lot of influence from my father, who was a teacher. And the taste, I like it, until today, to teach. I feel good. I think is a valuable work, I feel valued when I perform my function as a teacher. [...] I started young, very young, and I always worked this way, with a lot of

disposition, a lot of enthusiasm [...]. (Olga Ramos Brentano, 1991).

In the case of Olga, choosing a profession was related to family aspects, since her father, Silvério Ramos de Oliveira, was also a teacher. To Olga, he was “an education enthusiast”. She recalled that her father was an educated man who influenced her deeply and advised her to be calm and not to raise her voice to students, but rather be close to them. Olga started teaching in 1939, at 22 years old.

The memories of the first few years of teaching of Lídia, Liduvina, Catarina, Verônica, Dorotéia, Marina, Nair, and Ângelo allow us to see this universe of rural education, as well as the training – or the lack thereof – of those who taught having only a few years of school education themselves.

Lídia Lamper de Freitas Travi⁶ started her education at 7 years old, in the city of Montenegro; she went to the Colégio Elementar⁷ in Montenegro and, according to her account, there were many teachers, and many of them were from São Leopoldo and Porto Alegre. As for the beginning of her teaching career, she recounts that:

[...] the city government decided to also hold tests. Then I passed, I was, I had already finished the 6th grade, and I passed, I took the test and passed it very well. Then they designated me to Arroio Canoas [...] I finished the 6th grade but continued studying always during holidays (Lídia Lamper de Freitas Travi, 1987).

Lídia remarks that she continued taking development courses after entering the career. In relation to those, she quotes this part of a certificate: “We certify that Miss Lídia Lamper de Freitas has finished the Improvement Course at Colégio 7 de Setembro” (Lídia Lamper de Freitas Travi, 1987); it was dated December 10, 1921.

6- Born in 1903, in Montenegro, RS.

7- In Rio Grande do Sul, the colégios elementares corresponded to what was called Grupos Escolares in the rest of the country.

Liduvina Sirtoli Tisott began her education at 11 years old, starting school around 1923. She recalled that:

The school was in an old church in São João Evangelista [...] da 4^a Légua, near Galópolis [...] I guess 8 kilometers, now they used to cut the road a bit, you know [...] It was municipal already, and the teacher was from Porto Alegre, his name was João de Laranjeira. They’d say there were many teachers back in Porto Alegre, and no work. But he didn’t stay long. [...] They didn’t like people from out of the region. Nobody liked him. I used to like that teacher [...] it was a bunch, they were all big already (referring to students) because there were no classes before, so they hadn’t had classes for a while [...] (Liduvina Sirtoli Tisott, 1987).

She remembers taking a test to start teaching; however, she could only teach “provisorily, since I didn’t have the minimum age, which was 18”. She received her education using the Seleta: “I learned a lot because I wanted to know. You know, we started with the 1st book, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and on to the seleta manuscript” (Liduvina Sirtoli Tisott, 1987). The seleta manuscript⁸ was used by 5th grade students.

Catarina Rosa Piva Foppa⁹ started studying in Garibaldi, where she learned the catechism around 1917, at approximately 7 years old, from a teacher who worked at the school her sisters attended. Her parents also taught her at home, which was mostly her father’s responsibility, since her mother “spoke Portuguese mixed with an Italian dialect, very messy” (Catarina Rosa Piva Foppa, 1988).

8- Seleta was a book organized by teacher Alfredo Clemente Pinto, whose work marked a number of generations in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. The name of the book was used instead of the word ‘grade’, such was the importance attributed to it. It is worth highlighting that Seleta compiled texts of Portuguese and Brazilian literature, as well as general culture. Its first edition dates from 1884. See Almeida (2007) for more information.

9- Born in 1910, in Garibaldi, RS, to Palmira Corbellini and Vicente Piva.

We could not establish accurately what her education level was when she began to teach, but based on indications we can see that she had studied for approximately seven years, then took the test and continued with development courses provided by the Garibaldi local government. About the selection process to start teaching, Catarina recounted: “I came here, and then the mayor... then I took a test, they had me write a composition, then they made a few questions, also about grammar, and I had to solve some simple math, and that was that” (Catarina Rosa Piva Foppa, 1988). According to her, at the time there was a training, of sorts, for teachers, which was held once a year by the teaching coordinator.

The coordinator was Naidés Bordini, she lived in Porto Alegre. She held meetings for all teachers together. That was once or twice a year, and they explained to us how we should do things at school and treat students, how everything was supposed to be done. She explained it all very well, because some teachers hit their students a lot, and they didn’t want that... even then”. [...] the inspector... Salvador Bordine, and Naidés, the coordinator, didn’t think that method was correct, they always wanted us to treat students using words [...] (Catarina Rosa Piva Foppa, 1988).

In this case, as in others, we notice a relative concern for pedagogical issues on the part of public administrators, as well as the circulation of modern pedagogical ideas. As the municipal education organization acquired an administrative framework, we can notice the regulation of school practices and teacher training based on the pedagogical premises of modernity.

In her accounts, Verônica Candiago Bortolon¹⁰ recalls she was started in school at 7 years old. Her teaching career began in 1930,

giving private classes in a shed owned by her uncle, Cirilo Ruzzarin.

[...] at 14 I needed to get myself clothing, and help my mother dress my brothers. So my uncle Cirilo Ruzzarion and Benício Pontalti, who were always friends of ours, said, “It would be nice if Verônica could come over to our place and teach our children. We’ll pay her something so she can help her mom”. Cirilo Ruzzarin said, “she can come to our place, because I have a big room on top of the dining room. We’ve made some benches, and she can start her life there”. So I went there, I went to live with my uncle and he would pay me 20 mil réis a month to teach his children, then they found the Bozzis, the Pezzis, other people [...] (Verônica Candiago Bortolon, 1985).

Dorotéia Rizzon Corte¹¹ recounts she was started in school at five and a half years old, in 1925, in the school located in the community of Tuiuti, where Marcolina Zacaron was teaching, and she taught in Italian, because “[...] no one understood anything”. She explains that they spoke Italian both at home and in school “because we didn’t understand anything. Then, after we adapted ourselves little by little, the teacher would explain things, and so we went [...]” (Dorotéia Rizzon Corte, 1986).

Teacher Dorotéia believed in the importance of speaking Portuguese, and said that they used to get home *all cheerful* with the new words they had learned. “My mom was glad, now my dad, was all the same to him, he’d say: Si, si, va lá, tanto fa parlar in italian come em brasilian¹²” (Dorotéia Rizzon Corte, 1986). She studied with the seleta, the first, second, and third books, and stayed in school

10- Born in 1915, in Caxias do Sul, RS.

11- Born on 09-27-1919, in São Marcos, RS, to Maria Étvolf Brisolin and Pedro Rizzon.

12- “My mom was glad, now my dad, it was all the same to him, he’d say: yes, yes, please, it’s the same, speaking Italian or Portuguese [Brazilian]. (Loosely translated by the authors).

for 5 years. She began her career giving private classes in 1932, helping another teacher, Marcolina Barcaron, in a municipal school; her parents would pay her 200 réis. At the time, she was 13 years old. Later, she took a test and was designated by mayor Miguel Muratori, but could not take over as she was only 15, and the minimum age was 18.

With regard to her first school years, Marina Bridi Moretto¹³ recounts that she was started in school in São Virgílio at approximately 7 years old, around 1933. It was called Escola São Virgílio, and, according to her accounts, there were indications that it was municipal, as she affirms that “*the teachers, I guess they were paid by the local government, but the school itself belonged to the community*” (Marina Bridi Moretto, 1986); there she studied until the 5th grade. She recalled that classes were numerous, ranging from 40 to 50 students each. Her first teacher was Isolina Rossi Lopes.

Marina Moretto says in his testimony that there was no qualified teachers at that time:

[...] I had only attended school like any child. I didn't prepare, all I did was finish 5th grade, and my name was appointed by this lady called Joana Gasperin. She lived in Linha Barro Experimental, and she was a friend of the Dante Mercucci family. (Marina Bridi Moretto, 1986).

Marina did not take any test to start teaching, she simply started working, then took a holiday course; she would come to town twice a week to study with a private teacher named Iole Rossi. Among the relevant things she taught was catechism, so that students could receive their First Communion.

Nair Menegotto Grandi¹⁴ was started in school at 6 years old, and followed until the 5th grade in a Grupo Escolar. Then she took

the admission test and started attending the Complementary course in Vacaria, but only completed the first year, because of the death of her father. She didn't finish the course, and studied until she was 16. “[...] my mom, now alone, said, ‘my daughter, you stay home’, but within two more years I'd have graduated” (Nair Menegotto Grandi, 1988).

Nevertheless, she took the test to start teaching: “When I took that test, in which I took the first place, they let me choose, and I went to teach in Linha Gumercindo, the school was in São Paulo”. (Nair Menegotto Grandi, 1988). She later took development courses.

Ângelo Araldi¹⁵ was born in Flores da Cunha in 1926 and was started in school at 6 years old. He finished primary education in Porto Alegre, and when he returned to Flores da Cunha, he was invited to work in a grocery store in Lages, but could not adapt to it. Later, his father sent for him because a teaching job had come up in a school called Osvaldo Cruz.

There were no more teachers left, it was in Linha Oitenta. [...] So my father sent me a letter [...] it was a municipal school. [...] I started teaching in the municipal school in October 1948, there weren't even tests for the municipal school at the time (Ângelo Araldi, 1989).

Over the 1930's, in RCI, and in accordance with the state and national education policies, the training of teachers, with many lay teachers already working, prompted debates and concerns on the part of public administrators. The trajectories of teachers allow us to suppose that the majority experienced the change from the condition of student to that of teacher, which Nóvoa (1991) explained as a teacher professionalization process that occurs on the job and through the evoking of representations constructed, during one's student days, about the teacher role.

13- Born in 1926, to Fortunata de Gregori and Daniel Bridi, in the countryside of Caxias do Sul, RS.

14- Born on 04-20-1927, to Anita Mengotto and João Becker Pedreira, in Bento Gonçalves, RS.

15- The son of Dosolina Corso Araldi and José Araldi Filho, born in Flores da Cunha, RS.

It is not a professionalization obtained in a prior, formal education for the subsequent exercise of teaching. Therefore, many of these teachers reproduced, in their teaching practice, the ways through which they had learned during their student years. We found records of pedagogical training courses and meetings with mandatory attendance, prompted by this condition, which were provided for teachers each year, during the summer holidays in the several municipalities studied.

School practices and doings in rural schools

With regard to practices, the accounts of Rosa Meneguetti Bovo¹⁶ draw the picture of a country in need of “someone” who could fill the teacher role. She was born in Italy and arrived in Brazil in 1908, first settling in São Paulo, where she stayed for a year, and then moved to Caxias, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. In her accounts she details her practice and way of teaching, what the school material was like, describing also the school, the children, the universe of a certain “school culture”. One aspect that stands out concerns the didactic material that was still used in the mid-1930’s.

She and her husband were hired by the superintendent to teach in the school of San Giacomo, where she stayed for a year:

After San Giacomo, they fired me. There were no more classes for me. There was this lady named Queiroz whom I met while teaching in San Giacomo, an older lady, it was to her that they’d send those who arrived (Rosa Meneguetti Bovo, 1988).

Her husband continued to teach in the community of São Ciro, which was private, i.e., a school that belonged to the community and was called the Italian school:

16- Born in 07-09-1900, to Elizabeta Cornetto and Giovanni Meneghetti, in Vescovana, Padova, Italy. The original copy of this interview is in Italian; it was transcribed in Italian and translated by the authors of this study.

First of all, I started by literating them, [...] then these books would come, they arrived, beautiful and illustrated. I started with literacy as the base, and I literated them [...] My motto was ‘I am Italian’, but they censored that sentence here” (Rosa Meneguetti Bovo, 1988).

According to Luchese (2007), until the mid-1930’s, ethnic community schools could be found in RCI, as well as didactic material from Italy¹⁷; however, starting in 1938, all these schools were shut down in compliance with nationalization laws.

The classes were numerous and, a general feature of isolated rural classes, all grades sat in the same classroom. “[...] I taught up to fifth grade: first, second, third, fourth, and fifth, I had 72 students enrolled who attended the school in Desvio Rizzo. Alone!” (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991). Teacher Guilhermina recalled that not even when she had her first son was she away from her teaching activities:

I never took leave. I had a baby, I was entitled to three months; my leave was for eight days, a week! [...] I thought the kids, with no classes for three months, they would be too harmed, because soon after that they’d have holidays [...] and because the school was right next to my house, I continued teaching (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

In the interview with Olga, differences between urban and rural schools were mentioned. She affirms that, in a comparison between the work of teachers in isolated schools and those working in urban areas, the work was a little different, since rural school teachers did everything, including the school’s clerical and cleaning tasks. There were no other

17- Indications in this account refer to the so-called ethnic-community schools existing in Brazil in German and Italian settlement regions, where didactic materials came from Italy and were funded by the Italian government in order to diffuse the patriotic ideals characteristic of Mussolini’s fascism.

professionals to help them. In contrast, in urban schools during the 1920's and 1930's there was some structure already, particularly in the Colégios Elementares and Grupos Escolares.

Guilhermina recalled that each teacher was responsible for cleaning the classroom and the school. Teachers resorted to the help of students (girls), as she recounts: “[...] there was always a student who liked it, and she was really kind to the teacher, so she insisted in helping” (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991). Sometimes, it was more than one student, since “[...] one polished the classroom, the other helped cleaning the floor, than they waxed it” (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

With regard to wearing uniforms, by analyzing photographs of the time, we realize that they were not very common until the late 1930's, when new legislations started to regulate their use. Guilhermina recalled that students' uniform was a white smock, and in cases of children from poor families, she would provide it herself by buying flour sacks from bakeries, bleaching them, and then sewing them for these students. Teacher Olga also narrated that state schools had a white smock for uniform, and its use was mandatory.

The municipal government provided some school material, such as chalk, a few books, and, for the poorer children, notebooks. Most used the blackboard as a support for writing (a slate board with a wooden frame), and later, notebooks. But amidst scarcity, creativity produced its improvised solutions. Dorotéia Rizzon Corte recalled that their notebooks were made from wrapping paper:

From wrapping, this wrapping paper. And it was sewn, you sewed it by hand, with a needle, you made a little notebook. I'd iron it and cut it not too big. In one sheet, for example, when you bought 1 kilo of sugar, those days it didn't come in a pack. So you'd fold it in four and then cut it. And, for example, you took some 4 or 5 and you had a nice little pad, and you drew

the lines with a pencil (Dorotéia Rizzon Corte, 1986).

As she mentioned the teaching methodology that was used, Olga affirmed that “[...] classes were generally expositive. But there was, there was also the application of methods like, like the project system, cores of interest that the teachers developed” (Olga Tonolli Sevilla, 1988). With regard to calendar and school celebrations, Guilhermina affirmed:

[...] the calendar was organized by the Municipal government. [...] On holidays, we had to celebrate the historical date, give a lecture, use it to talk about that specific topic, and students recited poems. We did some preparation, so it got to that civic time. We'd sing the Flag Anthem, the flag was raised, and we'd sing the National Anthem. In the afternoon, at 6 pm, the flat was brought down to the National Anthem (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

About school practices' civic emphasis, the interview with teacher Olga adds some contribution. To her, the teaching of history emphasized mainly Brazilian History:

It was considered like, very respectfully, with a lot of interest, this concern for having the student know our history. Certain facts were thus emphasized. [...] There was a concern for creating in students a patriotic feeling. (Olga Tonolli Sevilla, 1988).

According to Olga's account, the celebrations of the *Nation's Week*, for example, was “quite an occasion”. These teachers' memories are corroborated by several memoranda that were sent to municipal teachers advising about, and determining, civic practices. In Memorandum 1, of May 7, 1941, for example, the first section informed teachers that students were to sing the National Anthem

every day before starting their activities. At the day's end, it established that they were to sing the first two strophes of the Flag Anthem. It was the teacher's duty to be "the best example of feeling what he is teaching" (Memorandum 1, 05-07-1941). On Saturdays, the same memorandum informed that "the school as a whole, at the most suitable place, shall practice a greater act of civic celebration through the mass singing of the National Anthem and the Flag Anthem" (Memorandum 1, 05-07-1941). It was emphasized for the teacher to pay attention to the melody and, particularly, to how words were pronounced, "thus avoiding disfigurements or vices that might degrade municipal teaching" (Memorandum 1, 05-07-1941).

At a historical time of valuing strongly and building an ideal of Brazilian nationality, civic celebrations¹⁸ were held whether by singing anthems, celebrating civic dates, reading texts and poems, or by fixing distiches on classroom walls that represented this "Brazilianity" - which acquired a singular, special outline among immigrant descendants, who still spoke dialects and often learned Portuguese at school¹⁹. School routines were marked by festivities and celebrations of civic dates which were meant to instill significations and marks in children's identity formation. As Bittencourt (1992, p. 52) remarks, "a cult of sorts became prevalent which was gradually incorporated by teachers and students themselves."

Guilhermina also explained that on Mondays, for example, she would teach mathematics and Portuguese, which then were called arithmetic and grammar. Every teacher had to give that class everyday - it was indispensable. But they taught much more.

18 - For civic celebration days, this regulation determined that ceremonies would consist of: 1st) formation at the school at 9:00 a.m. for classes occurring in the morning, and 2:00 p.m. for those functioning in the afternoon; 2nd) singing the National Anthem; 3rd) teacher lecture alluding to the date; 4th) recitations by students, relating to the facts celebrated (Memorandum 1, 05-07-1941).

19 - As indicated by the studies of Faggion and Luchese (2011), Frosi and Mioranza (1983) and Frosi, Faggion and Dal Corno (2010).

Then there was a history topic, civility, we taught a lot about how children should behave while sitting in church, in front of people, how they should eat the soup, so we did the spoon grasp, how it should be [...]. These things about hygiene, brushing the teeth every morning, after meals, never going to the table without washing their hands [...]. All this civility elements were actually taught to children, because they need it, don't they? Because those were children from settlements, they didn't have certain rules, like hygiene ones. [...] Sometimes we had them draw. Geography was explained based on Caxias do Sul, which is the city they live in; then the state (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

She affirmed that, in the city, they worked for 208 school days, and there were no winter holidays.

[...] the teacher always had to be there earlier than class time. [...] half an hour before the class began, teachers had to be at the school. The classes started, with the students, at eight o'clock, and finished at twelve o'clock sharp (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

Recess was in the middle of the morning, for twenty minutes. With regard to other forms of knowledge, she explains that:

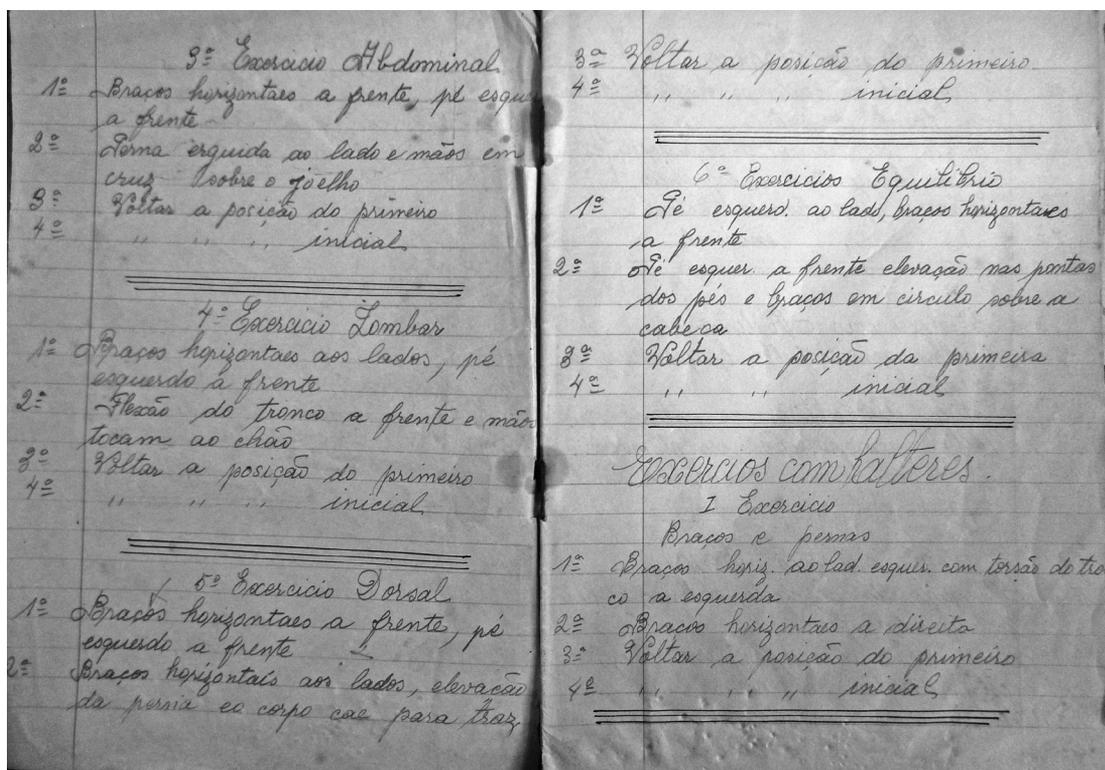
Civic hour was the first hour, it was religion and handwriting, so children would learn to write nicely, the right letter size. We had these notebooks with the proper lines: the smaller one for vowels, and the bigger, it was meant to expand consonants. Handwriting, we did it every Saturday. And then, there was drawing, we had them draw and make handicrafts with little saws that children... The girls did such wonderful things" [...] Handicraft, we did a lot of handicraft in my school. Even to Argentina they sent handicrafts

made in my school (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

Teacher Guilhermina recounted about the handicraft that was taught, with girls learning particularly knitting, embroidering, crochet, and even recipes. Boys were taught wood handicraft. She recalled that they would use the week Children's Day was celebrated to make excursions and hold the School Fair, with candies, games, and various activities.

In physical education, Guilhermina stressed, "Physical education, we had them... march, because they had to learn it, in Nation's Week we had to parade. We taught exercises for the torso, arms, legs, rising, things like that. Exercises more..." (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991). Examples of these memories and the physical education classes that Guilhermina used to give are shown in the figure below, which reproduces one of the teacher's class diaries:

Figure 1 – Class diary of teacher Guilhermina Poloni Costa, 1946.



Fonte: Private collection of Liliane Viero Costa's family.

The propositions written in 1946 on Guilhermina's diary indicate gymnastics exercises. According to the studies of Roso (2012) and Fonseca (2010), the teaching practices of physical education focused on gymnastics, particularly calisthenics and, later, in the 1950's, sports started to be widely practiced.

With regard to the school material used, most of the teachers recalled the importance of the use of didactic books which, due to the precarious training of several teachers, was the guiding element in their educational practice. Guilhermina recalled that:

It was the manuals that, well, brought the programs of the Elementar, about, from first to fourth grade [...]. Those books, I used them, but I used, I used them to prepare my class plan [...] there was this magazine that I subscribed, Tico-Tico, I guess it was Tico-Tico. It used to bring very beautiful things about teaching, studying, history, and I was a subscriber. [...] (Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa, 1991).

The presence of books, particularly school manuals and text-books, was remarkable, and their use in school routine is constantly recalled by the teachers (and also students). A resource used for copying, individual reading – either silently or aloud – and dictation. It was read, re-read, memorized, and, at times, declaimed. As Boto stresses (2012, p. 356)

[...] the book was the first one; sometimes, the only one. The school book was therefore sacred, as it bore the possibility of opening other books, which could be handled, copied, used, read, and understood like that one was.

Teacher Dorotéia Corte (1986) recounted that she prepared classes in advance, and “never went to school with an empty head”, therefore valuing the class plan, which was previously prepared based on existing manuals. Other accounts mention the importance of class planning, and how teachers were required by inspectors to register in advance what they intended to work on with the various grades.

With regard to school practices, Olga also mentioned the value of the excursions that a few schools promoted:

[...] excursions within school practices was a novelty, and they always had a knowledge purpose. They were taken very seriously by teachers, who then required students to respond to what they had learned, so they were very seriously considered. I learned

a lot through those excursions [...] (Olga Sevilla, 1988).

In addition to the knowledge of the disciplines they had to teach, teachers were viewed as a model of virtue, as missionaries, priests of knowledge, and as an example of conduct, and were therefore highly demanded and/or valued for their attitudes. As Almeida (1998, p. 37) affirms:

[...] because child caring was not distant from mothering, teaching represented a continuation of their *mission*, according to the models proposed by positivists and hygienists of the 19th century, and according to the social imaginary about the female role.

Guilhermina Costa (1991) fondly remembered the children’s parents, remarking that “I liked the area, the settlers were really nice, you know? They used to bring me a lot of fruits, a lot of things, they would invite me over for lunch at their homes [...]”. She had a very good relationship with the parents, who admired teachers and recognized the symbolical value of their work. Another teacher, Dorotéia, affirms that, in the community she lived in, a teacher was everything: “Ah! They adored the teacher, she was everything to them. They supported her, they gave her whatever they could. The teacher over there was a queen” (Dorotéia Corte, 1986). In her account, Dorotéia also highlighted the gifts that a teacher received when she was admired by parents:

If I tell you that they’d slaughtered a pig, it was the best rib, the sausages, the bacon, they brought everything to the teacher. So good! Each Saturday the teacher would bring it home, even when I started. She would bring a hen, eggs, cheese, milk, well she wouldn’t buy anything. Beans, garlic, onion, potatoes, she would just bring it home (Dorotéia Corte, 1986).

Other interviewees also recounted that families were receptive, that the teacher was always receiving gifts, that she was often invited to share special moments in the community, such as parties and lunches. To a family, a teacher's visit, like a priest's, was both a joy and a distinction.

Final considerations

The memories of the teachers are telling about the role of communities in the formation and institution of teaching. These were lay teachers, some with few years of education, who, because of their bond to the community space, as well as necessity and opportunity, became teachers by themselves. Over the career, they found support in development courses, teaching schools, or autodidacticism, thus building complementary training opportunities. Teaching experiences were connected to the community space, with a social sense that they valued to the point that a teacher was a catechist, an advisor, and a community leader. As Fernandes (1998) reminds us, in a way, many of these teachers were missionaries, or so they were expected to be, capable of sacrificing or abandoning personal and even professional ambitions in order to figure themselves in a transcendental destiny. They played:

[...] one of teacher's traditional roles, that which characterizes him both as a spiritual agent – as a teacher –, and as a social guide – as a model of personality within the community (FERNANDES, 1998, p. 03).

According to the interviews, to the RCI communities, a good teacher was one who, regardless of his/her training, succeeded in being a life example; who fulfilled his/her duties by respecting class time, keeping discipline, teaching the basic reading, writing, and calculation notions in a suitable way; who was capable of organizing students in an orderly, respectful, cleanly manner, as well as

participating in the community's socializing moments, festivities, and other happenings; someone with a good character, no vices, and who preserved 'good customs'. On the other hand, teachers who did not have an attitude considered 'ideal' by the families seldom remained among them. Luchese (2007, p. 392) affirms that:

The great majority of the first teachers in the Italian Settlement Region did not have a pedagogical training. Many of those who worked [...] had an elementary education only. However, most of them were the most learned persons in the community, and that condition, combined with their being 'masters', generated prestige, respect, and community leadership. Many teachers assumed, within the social environment they lived in, a central role in religious, claiming, and organization issues, thus becoming representatives of their groups, if not local leaders. These were the representations produced about being a teacher.

We believe that the memories of these teachers acquire at once both particular meanings, as they express singular feelings and experiences, but also collective ones, as they intertwine in contact points, thus producing a past that is recomposed by bringing dimensions hardly perceived through written documents. Using memory as a source is perhaps an attempt at managing "to rebuild originality, irreducible to any *a priori* definition, of each system of thought, in its complexity and displacements" (CHARTIER, 2002, p. 27). Therefore, through the accounts, crossed with various documents, we have means of perceiving aspects of the daily life of those rural schools pervaded by specific practices adapted to their cultural context.

To Grazziotin and Kreutz, "in research, memories, in addition to the history of a region, refer to the system of thought, the mentality of a period, as well as its forms of behavior,

values, and priorities” (p.16, 2010). They allow, at times, realizing the degree of importance that certain questions have reached in the life of a community, to the detriment of others. They give us access, through a rigorous methodological and theoretical attitude, “to understand the confluence, in school life, between the tendency to conservation and the wish for changes”, as Boto affirms (2012, p. 364).

By comparing the teachers’ narratives, we realize that they also brought different elements that participated in individual and collective education, allowing us to spot common facts, such as the importance of the school to those communities, the circulation of representations about the good teacher, teaching as an opportunity emerging with the lack of trained teachers, the selection and appointment processes for the teaching career, the educative practices, the knowledge taught, and the material used.

As we go through the memories of these teachers, we realize their work conditions and social experiences as lay teachers who worked in RCI rural schools, which enriches these memories as documents where “[...] the historian will attempt to read the codes of another time which may, at times, appear incomprehensible [...] given the filters that the past interposes” (PESAVENTO, 2004, p. 42). Rural teaching activities and school cultures that emerge from memories, between the remembered and the forgotten, the experienced and the dreamed, the individual and the collective, the preserved and the sunk in oblivion.

Interviews analyzed in article

Angelo Araldi was interviewed on 10.27.1989 by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Catarina Rosa Piva Foppa was interviewed on 11.07.1988 by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto.

Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Dorotéia Rizzon Corte was interviewed by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto on 07.01.1986. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Guilhermina Lora Poloni Costa was interviewed by Susana Storchi Grigoletto on October 21, 1991. A transcript of the interview is in the João Spadari Adami Municipal Historical Archive Memory Base, Caxias do Sul, RS, Brasil.

Lidia Lamper de Freitas Travi was interviewed by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto, on 08.27.1987. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Liduvina Sirtoli Tisott was interviewed on 08.27.1987 by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Marina Bridi Moretto was interviewed on 03.18.1986 by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Nair Menegotto Pedreira Grandi was interviewed on 03.01.1988, by teacher Corina Michelin Dotti. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Olga Ramos Brentano was interviewed by Gilmar Marcílio and Janete Zucolotto on October 24, 1991. A transcript of the interview is in the João Spadari Adami Municipal Historical Archive Memory Base, Caxias do Sul, RS, Brasil.

Olga Tonolli Sevilla was interviewed on 04.29.1988, by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Rosa Meneghetti Bovo was interviewed on 03.12.1988, by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. The interview transcribed by Tranquila

Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

Verônica Candiago Bortolon was interviewed on 10.03.1985 by teacher Liane Beatriz Moretto. Interview transcript by Tranquila Brambina Moresco Brando; the collection of the Historical and Cultural Memory Institute of Universidade de Caxias do Sul.

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