Communities of practice and German language teacher education projects - convergences and dissonances

[Comunidades de prática e projetos de formação de professores de língua alemã - convergências e dissonâncias]

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Abstract: The central issue of this study is the need for a greater link between theory and practice, focusing on the initial education of German language teachers. Considering two university Third Mission projects, in which such articulation is at its core, the article sheds light on one of the practices developed in these projects: the weekly pedagogical mentoring meetings. In this sense, training   is seen as a stage in the construction of learning, understood as a collective and social process. In this way, we bring up the concept of communities of practice and, based on the perception of the students taking part in the projects, we try to understand the contributions of this concept to projects of this nature, identifying commonalities and dissonances between the projects described and communities of practice, according to the literature reviewed. Although our *corpus* pointed to some divergent aspects between the projects and some of the characteristics attributed to communities of practice, we saw that, to a large extent, the convergent points stand out, such as the predominance of a perception of trust between the participants, as well as the appreciation of orientation meetings as spaces for the collective construction of knowledge from a decentralized and horizontal perspective.

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Resumo: O tema central deste estudo é a de uma maior articulação entre teoria e prática, focando especificamente na formação inicial de professores de língua alemã. Considerando dois projetos de extensão universitária, nos quais tal articulação se encontra em sua espinha dorsal, o artigo lança luz sobre uma das práticas neles desenvolvidas ~~nesses projetos~~: os encontros semanais de orientação pedagógica. Nesse sentido, a formação é percebida como uma etapa de construção de aprendizagem, aqui entendida como um processo coletivo e social. Deste modo, trazemos à discussão o conceito de comunidades de prática e, a partir das percepções dos estudantes participantes dos projetos, buscamos compreender as contribuições deste conceito para projetos desta natureza, identificando pontos em comum e dissonantes entre os projetos descritos no artigo e comunidades de prática, conforme a literatura revisada. Apesar do nosso *corpus* apontar alguns aspectos divergentes entre os projetos e algumas das características atribuídas a comunidades de prática, vimos que, em grande medida, sobressaem-se os pontos convergentes, como o predomínio de uma percepção de confiança entre os participantes, além da valorização dos encontros de orientação como espaços de construção coletiva de conhecimento numa perspectiva descentralizada e horizontalizada.

Palavras-chave: formação de professores de alemão; projetos de extensão universitária; comunidades de prática

1 Introduction

This article centers on the initial training of German language teachers (STANKE ET AL., 2017). It takes as its starting point key principles and guidelines for teacher education in Brazil (such as laws and resolutions) and situates its analysis within the context of two university extension projects focused on teacher preparation at public universities in Rio de Janeiro. Emphasizing the interplay between theory and practice in teacher education, the study highlights the practices developed in these projects, drawing on concepts related to communities of practice and learning, as well as on observations and accounts from participating student teachers.

The study therefore places particular emphasis on the perspectives of the students involved in the projects – presented below – regarding various aspects such as the practices carried out, the challenges they faced, and their own engagement and commitment both to the projects and to their professional development. To this end, the concept of communities of practice (WENGER 2013; WENGER; TRAYNER 2015; WENGER;

MCDERMOTT; SNYDER 2002) serves as a central framework, as it offers valuable insights into one of the main pillars of the projects under discussion: the fostering of learning and professional growth through the exchange of experiences.

As Wenger (2013) argues, membership in a community of practice creates favorable conditions for collaboration, as it promotes the sharing of knowledge and the collective development of its participants. From this perspective, learning is understood as a social process, centered on interaction, the exchange of ideas and experiences, and dialogue. Against this backdrop – and considering the specific challenges in German teacher education, such as the scarcity of public schools for practicum opportunities – this article seeks to examine whether and how groups formed by undergraduate students and supervising professors in these two extension projects can be understood as communities of practice. Furthermore, from the standpoint of the participating students, the study aims not only to analyze how involvement in these projects contributes to the initial and continuing education of language teachers, but also to understand the significance participants attribute to their roles and their active engagement as essential members of the group. For this purpose, an anonymous online questionnaire was developed and completed by participants from both projects. The analysis of the responses revealed a strong understanding of what can be summarized in two main axes: the exchange of experiences among members and the importance of committed participation in both the group and the projects.

2 The Challenges of Teacher Education in/for German Language Teaching

The education of German language teachers in Brazil rests on two pillars: first, the linguistic training in German of undergraduate students, who, as a rule, enter Portuguese/German language and literature programs at universities in Rio de Janeiro[3]

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[3] The situation differs in some other teacher education institutions in the southern region of Brazil, such as the Instituto de Formação de Professores de Língua Alemã (IFPLA, Ivoti), where students are required to demonstrate language proficiency through the DSD1 certification (Deutsches Sprachdiplom is a German language proficiency diploma, equivalent to level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (COUNCIL OF EUROPE 2001), issued by the Conference of Ministers of Education and

without prior knowledge of German (since knowledge of the language is not a prerequisite for admission to these programs in Rio de Janeiro); and second, the didactic-pedagogical training for teaching German language and literature (Stanke et al., 2017; Stanke; Ferreira 2022). Beyond being a considerable challenge in itself, there is also a significant specific challenge concerning the didactic-pedagogical preparation of German language teacher trainees: the need to articulate theory and practice throughout the entire training period (a requirement established in official documents and resolutions on teacher education in Brazil), coupled with the severe shortage of public schools in Rio de Janeiro that offer German language instruction (Ferreira; Stanke 2023). In the following paragraphs, we will highlight some points that may help us better understand the scope of this challenge.

As early as the beginning of the 2000s, the Advisory Opinion (*Parecer*) of the National Education Council (CNE/CP 9/2001) established the following guideline: "the acquisition of the required competencies by teachers must take place through a theoretical-practical approach, that is, every theoretical systematization must be articulated with practice, and every practice must be articulated with reflection"[4] (Brasil 2001: 29). This was followed by other opinions and resolutions that stressed this premise even more emphatically, such as Resolution CNE/CP No. 2 of 2015, which provides for "the articulation between theory and practice in the teacher education process, grounded in the mastery of scientific and didactic knowledge, contemplating the inseparability of teaching, research, and outreach"[5] (Brasil 2015: 4).

Another relevant example is Resolution CNE/CP No. 2 of 2019, which "defines the National Curricular Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education at Higher Education Level for Basic Education and establishes the Common National Base for Initial Teacher

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Cultural Affairs of Germany, Kultusministerkonferenz) (cf. https://www.institutoivoti.com.br/institucional/ifpla. Accessed on Sep. 6, 2024).

[4] Original text: "a aquisição de competências requeridas do professor deverá ocorrer mediante uma ação teórico-prática, ou seja, toda sistematização teórica articulada com o fazer e todo fazer articulado com a reflexão".

[5] "a articulação entre a teoria e a prática no processo de formação docente, fundada no domínio dos conhecimentos científicos e didáticos, contemplando a indissociabilidade entre ensino, pesquisa e extensão".

Education (BNC-Formação)"[6] (BRASIL 2019: 2). The integration of theory and practice in teacher training appears in several passages of this Resolution, such as in Chapter 2, which states: "the articulation between theory and practice for teacher education, grounded in scientific and didactic knowledge, contemplating the inseparability of teaching, research, and outreach, aimed at ensuring student development"[7] (BRASIL 2019: 3). The same document, in Chapter 4, further specifies the need for this theoretical-practical articulation throughout the degree program, describing the curricular organization of courses, with the following allocation of practical workload: 400 hours of supervised teaching practice in real school settings and 400 hours of pedagogical practice related to curricular components, distributed across the program from its outset (BRASIL 2019: 6). Despite the emphasis placed on this articulation in official documents, the scarcity of public schools offering German in their formal curricula makes the implementation of these guidelines particularly difficult.

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, German was part of the curriculum at Colégio Pedro II from its founding in 1837 until the early 1990s, when it was discontinued. In the private sector, three major schools currently include German in their curricula: Colégio Cruzeiro (with two campuses, in Centro and Jacarepaguá), the German School Corcovado (in Botafogo), and the Swiss-Brazilian School (in Barra da Tijuca). More recently, the situation has begun to shift following the publication of Opinion No. 1 in 2018 by the Municipal Council of Education, which approved "the operation of bilingual schools in English, French, and Spanish, and authorized, on an experimental basis, German bilingual education in municipal public schools in Rio de Janeiro"[8] (RIO DE JANEIRO: 2018, online). As a result, three municipal schools within the so-called Bilingual Schools Project of the Municipal Department of Education introduced German into their curricula in 2018: CIEP Oswald de Andrade (in Parque Anchieta), E.M. Epitácio Pessoa (in Andaraí), and CIEP

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[6] Original text: "define as Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Formação Inicial em Nível Superior de Professores para a Educação Básica e institui a Base Nacional Comum para a Formação Inicial de Professores da Educação Básica (BNC-Formação)".

[7] Original text: "a articulação entre a teoria e prática para a formação docente, fundada nos conhecimentos científicos e didáticos, contemplando a indissociabilidade entre o ensino, a pesquisa e a extensão, visando à garantia do desenvolvimento dos estudantes".

[8] Original text: "o funcionamento de escolas bilíngues inglesa, francesa e espanhola, e autoriza[va], em caráter experimental, a escola bilíngue alemã nas unidades escolares da rede pública do sistema municipal de ensino do Rio de Janeiro"

Professor Darcy Ribeiro (in Campo Grande), the latter of which was replaced in early 2024 by E.M. Rodrigo Mello Franco Andrade (also in Andaraí).

Similarly, the State Department of Education of Rio de Janeiro, through the Full-Time Education Program, has implemented the Intercultural Schools Project. Within this initiative, Colégio Estadual Professora Eliane Martins Dantas Brasil-Alemanha (in Brás de Pina, Rio de Janeiro) was established in 2022, also incorporating German into its curriculum.

This brief overview makes clear the scope of the challenge regarding the availability of school settings for internships and the fulfillment of the practical component of German teacher education in Rio de Janeiro. Out of a total of 1,544 municipal schools and more than 250 state schools (according to data from the municipal and state education departments of Rio de Janeiro), only four public schools currently offer German, representing just over 0.002% of schools. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this scarcity of German language instruction in the public school system, while posing a significant challenge, does not render the practical training of Portuguese/German teacher trainees unfeasible. Different strategies have been developed to address this gap, one of the most prominent being the creation of extension projects designed to promote the teaching and learning of German while simultaneously expanding opportunities for teaching practice. Some of these projects will be described briefly in the next section.

3 Theoretical-Practical Teacher Education in University Extension Projects

In Resolution No. 4 of the National Council of Education (Brasil 2024), published in the current year, the following passage emphasizes the triad of higher education – teaching, research, and extension – while highlighting the role of practice in teacher education:

> [...] the inseparable articulation between theory and practice in the process of teacher education, grounded in the critical and contextualized exercise of professional capacities, through the mobilization of scientific, pedagogical, aesthetic, and ethical-political knowledge, ensured by the indissociability of teaching, research, and extension and by

the integration of undergraduate students into Basic Education institutions, the privileged space of teaching praxis[9] (BRASIL 2024: 3).

This excerpt draws attention to the term *praxis*, understood, for example, in different works by Freire (1987; 1996) as the outcome of action and reflection. In this sense, the space for teaching practice, centered on both action and reflection, may be effectively realized through extension projects. Such projects aim to address, at least in part, the lack of opportunities for teaching practice in public schools in Rio de Janeiro, particularly with regard to the provision of German language instruction. Examples of extension projects focused on German teaching in schools include PALEP (Projeto Aula de Línguas em Espaços Públicos, UFRJ), OLEE (Projeto Oficinas de Línguas Estrangeiras nas Escolas, UERJ), and EnALE (Ensino de Alemão em Escolas Públicas, UERJ). These initiatives share the dual purpose of offering free German language workshops in schools while also expanding opportunities for practical training in the initial education of German teachers.

Beyond these extension projects, which are specifically dedicated to the school context, teacher education initiatives such as the *Programa Institucional de Bolsas de Iniciação à Docência* (PIBID), at the federal level, likewise aim to foster the articulation between theory and practice in initial teacher training by promoting university–school interaction from the very beginning of undergraduate studies. At UERJ, similarly, different types of teaching initiation scholarships are available through the *Departamento de Estágios e Bolsas / Cetreina*.

The present article now turns to two extension projects that are the central focus of this study. Both are dedicated to language teaching for university-internal and external communities: the CLAC project (*Cursos de Línguas Abertos à Comunidade*) at the Faculty of Letters, UFRJ, and the PLIC project (*Projeto de Línguas para a Comunidade*), part of the LICOM Extension Program (*Línguas para a Comunidade*) at the Institute of

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[9] Original text: "articulação indissociável entre a teoria e a prática no processo de formação dos profissionais do magistério, fundamentada no exercício crítico e contextualizado das capacidades profissionais, a partir da mobilização de conhecimentos científicos, pedagógicos, estéticos e ético-políticos, assegurados pela indissociabilidade entre ensino, pesquisa e extensão e pela inserção dos licenciandos nas instituições de Educação Básica, espaço privilegiado da práxis docente".

Letters, UERJ. These two initiatives constitute the primary context of this study, which will describe them in greater detail in the following section.

3.1 The Extension Projects CLAC and PLIC and their main features

Like the projects focused on the school environment, CLAC and PLIC also contribute to the initial education of undergraduate students in Language and Literature programs by offering language courses to both the university's internal and external communities. These are self-financed initiatives[10]: course participants pay a modest semester fee, which covers the scholarships of student-teachers – undergraduates who teach the classes – as well as project-related expenses, such as didactic or consumable materials.

German language courses in CLAC and PLIC are thus taught by undergraduates from the Portuguese/German Language and Literature programs (*Letras-Português/Alemão*) at UFRJ and UERJ, respectively. The two projects share a range of assumptions and characteristics, including the close supervision and guidance of university faculty, who accompany the practices developed within the projects (STANKE; FERREIRA 2022). A central component of both projects is the weekly pedagogical supervision meetings, which provide an essential space for the exchange of information, theoretical readings, practical experiences, and reflections among student-teachers and supervisors. The primary goal of these meetings is to discuss various aspects of the classroom and of the German teaching–learning process. Topics addressed in these sessions include lesson planning (semester-long and per lesson), the selection, adaptation, and creation of teaching materials, classroom management, the design and implementation of assessment tools, among others. These meetings can thus be recognized as embodying the "centrality of practice" outlined in the 2019 Resolution previously cited in this study. In this context, future teachers are able to experience

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[10] To illustrate, in current values (Sep. 2024), the semester fee for CLAC is 700 reais, while PLIC participants pay 330 reais per semester (cf. http://www.licomletrasuerj.pro.br/downloads/2024_2/Licom_Edital_Sorteio_2024_2_COM_ANEXOS.pdf Accessed on Dec. 5, 2024). For comparison, the semester fee at the Goethe-Institut, the main German language teaching institution, is approximately 3,800 reais.

"planning, teaching, and evaluating lessons under the mentorship of experienced professors or coordinators," another key principle established in the document (BRASIL 2019: 4).

Given the significant potential of these projects – especially the pedagogical supervision meetings as spaces for the exchange and co-construction of knowledge – and considering the literature on the concept of Communities of Practice, we are prompted to raise the following questions: Can the groups that constitute these extension projects be understood as Communities of Practice? Do the participating undergraduates perceive themselves as members of such communities (of practice or of learning), or do they tend to interpret their learning and training from an individualized perspective? To explore these and related questions, the following sections provide a brief review of the concept of Communities of Practice and analyze a corpus of responses from extension students to an anonymous online questionnaire designed to better understand and discuss the issues raised here.

4 Teacher Education and Communities of Practice

In studies addressing the knowledge required for teaching practice, we find various complementary elements, with different authors attributing greater or lesser emphasis to each. Among these are content-related knowledge, pedagogical-didactic knowledge, and affective-emotional knowledge, all of which appear alongside other forms of knowledge that are highlighted to varying degrees depending on the author. At this point, it is important to note that we understand "teaching knowledge" (*saber docente*) similarly to what was proposed by Tardif (2002), namely, as "a broad sense that encompasses teachers' knowledge, competencies, skills (or aptitudes), and attitudes – what has often been called 'knowing,' 'knowing how,' and 'knowing how to be'"[11] (TARDIF 2002: 60).

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[11] OriginaL texto: 2002), isto é, de "um sentido amplo, que engloba os conhecimentos, competências, habilidades (ou aptidões) e as atitudes dos docentes, ou seja, aquilo que foi muitas vezes chamado de 'saber', de 'saber-fazer' e de 'saber-ser'".

Furthermore, Tardif emphasizes that this knowledge spans a wide range of objects, issues, and problems, all directly or indirectly implicated in the teaching profession. Thus, teachers' professional knowledge is, according to Tardif, plural and heterogeneous, involving cognitive, methodological, and social dimensions, among others, each derived from equally diverse sources and origins. One of the main sources of teachers' knowledge, he argues, is practical experience, maintaining that "work experience seems to be the privileged source of their knowledge of teaching" (2002: 61). Consequently, the social aspects of teaching knowledge appear to occupy a central place, given that the exchange of experiences is a crucial factor for professional development.

In projects focused on the initial education of German teachers, one can argue that beyond learning methodological and didactic-pedagogical aspects, as well as content knowledge related to what will be taught (in our case, German language and culture) and how it will be taught (teaching materials, course and lesson planning, etc.), strong emphasis is placed on the exchange of experiences among project participants (STANKE ET AL 2021). We thus highlight the social dimension of learning, as it is in exchanges with peers that the above-mentioned aspects are thematized, discussed, and shared (IPIRANGA ET AL. 2005). Drawing on Wenger (1998), Ipiranga et al. (2005: 2) outline several principles that encapsulate the social perspective of learning:

· learning is inherent to human nature;
· it constitutes the primary and essential ability to negotiate new meanings;
· it is fundamentally experiential and social;
· it transforms identities and constructs trajectories of participation;
· it involves dealing with boundaries;
· it entails dynamics of social energy, power, alignment, and engagement;
· it requires reciprocal interaction between the local and the global (IPIRANGA ET AL. 2005: 2).

Learning as social participation presupposes the active engagement of individuals in different practices of social communities, as Wenger (1998) explains:

[...] being alive as human beings means that we are constantly engaged in the pursuit of enterprises of all kinds [...]. As we define these enterprises and engage in their pursuit together, we interact with each other and with the world, and we need to tune our relations with each other and with the world accordingly. In other words, we learn. Over time, this

collective learning results in practices that reflect both the pursuit of our enterprises and the social relations accompanying them. These practices are thus the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise. It therefore makes sense to call these kinds of communities communities of practice (WENGER 1998: 45).

Building on this understanding of learning as a social practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) developed a model of learning centered on individuals' participation in groups or associations, which they called "communities of practice." The concept refers to "a group of people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor" (WENGER; TRAYNER 2015: 1). The authors further specify that communities of practice (CoPs) are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and seek to learn how to do it better through regular and sustained interaction.

In this sense, CoPs centers on social processes of learning, bringing together individuals who share a common domain or area of interest and who recognize the importance of belonging to such a group, valuing the knowledge exchanged within it. Wenger and Trayner (2015) emphasize three core components that distinguish a CoP from a mere gathering of people (such as residents of the same condominium): domain, community, and practice. These are briefly outlined below:

- *Domain* refers to the content, that is, the shared object(s) of interest among community members. Membership in a CoP entails commitment to this domain, which forms a body of shared knowledge distinguishing it from other groups or communities. From this shared domain, members value their collective competence, learning from each other – even if few outside the group acknowledge or value their expertise.

- *Community* is characterized by members' engagement in joint activities and discussions that foster mutual learning. Beyond sharing a common domain, what defines a CoP is the interaction through which knowledge is exchanged among members.

- *Practice* refers to the repertoire of shared resources that participants develop in relation to their domain. This includes experiences, tools, stories, and ways of

addressing recurring problems. While individual repertoires may exist, the sharing of such repertoires is essential to the existence of a CoP.

According to the authors, a community of practice can only be said to exist when these three components – domain, community, and practice – are combined. From this perspective, knowledge becomes a crucial asset to be managed strategically. The concept of CoPs thus represents an approach that focuses on people and the social structures that enable them to share knowledge and learn from one another.

4.1 Conditions for the Development of CoPs and Their Main Challenges

The characteristics and assumptions presented thus far regarding CoPs may appear relatively straightforward and concrete; however, important conditions must be in place for such communities to develop. One of these is that the domain must be meaningful and relevant to participants. The value of participation generally needs to be recognized by the community; otherwise, members may not feel motivated to engage. In this sense, members must perceive tangible benefits from their involvement.

This points to another consideration: the intensity of members' participation may vary depending on factors such as the degree of experience or knowledge in relation to a given practice or topic. Naturally, other factors may also influence participation, including motivation, external incentives from higher authorities (e.g., project coordinators), or the influence of other participants in leadership positions within the CoP. Moreover, affective and emotional aspects – such as trust, fear, or satisfaction – can also affect the extent of members' engagement.

Regarding intensity of participation, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) identify three levels: a core group, consisting of a small number of individuals who participate very actively and intensely in discussions; an active group, also relatively small, whose members contribute regularly though less intensively than the core; and a peripheral group, comprising individuals who attend meetings but rarely speak and tend to adopt a more passive, observant stance. It is important to note, however, that these

levels of participation are fluid – members may shift from the core to the periphery, and vice versa, over time.

Beyond participation intensity, another key factor in the development of CoPs is the autonomous and voluntary nature of members' involvement. Additional aspects such as *objectives* and *duration* are highlighted in Schmitt's (2012) comparative framework, based on Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002). In this framework, the author contrasts CoPs with other organizational group forms, such as formal work groups, project teams, or informal groups:

Table 1: Comparison between CoPs and Other Forms of Organization

	Communities of Practice	Formal Work Groups	Project Teams	Informal Groups
Objectivs	Develop and expand members' knowledge; generate and exchange knowledge	Develop products or services	Carry out specific tasks	Exchange information on work or study
Participants	Voluntary and autonomous participation	Volunteers responding to group manager	Members chosen by supervisors or managers	Friends and acquaintances in work or study contexts
Common Ground	Shared interests, commitment, and identification with the group's expertise	Work requirements and shared goals	Project goals and key elements	Mutual needs or goals
Duration	As long as interest in maintaining the group persists	Until a new task is assigned	Until the project is completed	As long as interest in maintaining contact with others remains

Source: Schmitt (2012: 55)

From the observations in the table and the preceding discussion, we can say that some elements associated with CoPs appear to be more or less reflected in the practices developed in the extension projects analyzed in this study. Regarding similarities and differences with other forms of collective organization, several commonalities can be identified between CoPs and these projects – such as shared interests and the common

goal of generating and exchanging knowledge among members. However, despite participants' voluntary decision to join the projects, their participation in academic supervision meetings (the primary training activity in these projects) is mandatory. This diverges from the essentially voluntary and autonomous participation characteristic of CoPs.

Another point of divergence concerns duration: while CoPs are sustained by participants' interest without a pre-defined endpoint, the extension projects have no predetermined conclusion, but individual members' participation is time-limited. In other words, the project itself continues, but members may remain only as long as their affiliation with the projects lasts – a condition linked not only to their personal interest but also to external factors, such as the completion of their degree programs, which leads to their departure from both the project and the university.

Having contextualized the study and established its main theoretical underpinnings, we now turn to the methodological pathways pursued, followed by the analysis and discussion of data generated through our research instrument.

5 Research Design and Procedures

As highlighted in the introductory section, this study is centered on the reflection upon projects focusing on the education of German language teachers at two public universities in Rio de Janeiro, drawing on aspects considered essential for achieving its primary objective: the exchange of experiences as a driving force for learning and for the academic-professional development of its members. The basis for this reflection and discussion consists of a literature review addressing teacher education in German in Rio de Janeiro, the concept of Communities of Practice and its main principles, as well as the generation of data through an anonymous online questionnaire completed by participants of the two teacher education projects under consideration.

Accordingly, this research may be situated within a qualitative-interpretative paradigm (DENZIN; LINCOLN 2006), as it focuses on qualitative aspects while considering the contexts in which the researchers, participants, and data are embedded. It is, therefore,

a study aimed at understanding and interpreting phenomena according to the meanings they hold for the individuals involved in them (DENZIN; LINCOLN 2006: 17).

In order to access participants' perceptions of aspects emphasized in the literature on CoPs, and to investigate in particular how they understand the projects, their participation and engagement, as well as their enthusiasm, an online questionnaire was developed. Respondents could not be identified, as the email collection function was disabled and any questions that could reveal the identity of the participant were avoided. This procedure aimed to ensure that participants felt at ease in expressing their impressions, seeking to avoid any potential embarrassment in relation to possible stances or responses of a negative nature. The questions formulated were as follows:

1. How would you describe yourself and your fellow project participants – students and supervising teacher(s)?

2. What factors hinder or impair your participation in the project?

3. In your view, what factors could contribute to greater participation and commitment to the group/project? On a scale of 1 to 5 (from "not at all" or "less" to "fully" or "very much"), please select one option for the following questions:

4. To what extent do you feel comfortable expressing yourself about your teaching practice, including your mistakes and successes? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5). Please justify your choice.

5. How do you evaluate your commitment to the group/project? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5). Please justify your choice.

6. How do you evaluate your engagement and participation in the pedagogical mentoring meetings? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5). Please justify your choice.

7. Do you agree that the quality of your participation can influence the group's learning process? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5). Please justify your choice.

8. How do you evaluate your enthusiasm regarding the activities you perform as a teacher in the project? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5). Please justify your choice.

At present, there are ten *tutors – monitores –* (the designation given to scholarship students participating in the CLAC Extension Project at UFRJ), while six teaching interns

are engaged in the PLIC Extension Project at UERJ. Of the total sixteen extension participants across both projects, thirteen responded to the online questionnaire, which may be considered a representative number. Selected excerpts from participants' comments and observations in the questionnaire will be used to illustrate the analyses conducted. In such cases, responses were numbered from 1 to 13 (corresponding to the number of respondents) and are represented in the study as "R1," "R2," and so forth. In this way, respondents' identities are safeguarded, since the questionnaires were anonymous and contained no identifying information, while still indicating which respondent made the respective comment.

In the following section, the corpus formed by the responses of the participating students will be analyzed and discussed.

6 What Do We Share with Communities of Practice? The CLAC and PLIC Projects in the Perception of Preservice Teachers

In order to better understand the students who participated in the projects and their perception of their supervising professors, as well as of themselves as teachers in training, we formulated the following question: "How would you describe yourself and your fellow project participants – students and supervising professor(s)?" Regarding their perception of the supervisors, respondents mentioned a variety of adjectives such as "didactic," "hardworking," "supportive," and "willing to listen." Two participants also used the adjective "inspiring" orally. In relation to how they see themselves and their peers, the most recurrent adjectives were "hardworking," "diligent," "dedicated," and "engaged," which are therefore quite similar to the terms also used in reference to the professors. Concerning their perception of their fellow students, some terms stand out for having appeared repeatedly in different responses, such as "proactive" and "open to new ideas." One could argue that the idea of "openness" to different perspectives and ideas, as well as the willingness to contribute, underscores key assumptions of CoPs – namely, the exchange of knowledge and experiences among participants.

Regarding Question 2, we sought to understand the main factors that could potentially hinder students' participation in the projects. Two major factors were mentioned by respondents: first, issues of organization and time, cited in five of the responses, suggesting difficulties in balancing the general demands of university studies and academic training with the equally demanding participation in teacher education projects, such as those examined in this study. Examples of responses include "time and organization" (R1), "disorganization at certain moments" (R8), or "the number of courses to complete at university" (R11). Another factor explicitly mentioned in three responses referred to personal issues, suggesting difficulties beyond the university context. For example, R6 stated: "I have rather deep issues that cause me difficulties with doing anything, which inevitably affects my participation," while R13 remarked: "Only personal issues, which directly impact my motivation and dedication to the project." It is also noteworthy that three respondents affirmed that there were no factors hindering their participation in the projects.
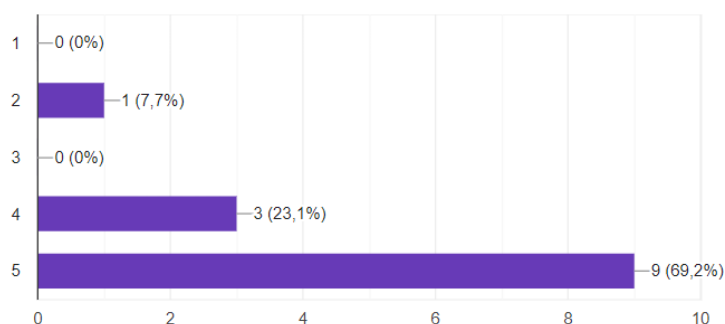
On the other hand, we also asked participants which factors could contribute to their greater participation and commitment to the project. We consider this an essential point if we aim to bring the projects even closer to the conceptions that characterize CoPs. Interestingly, the most frequently cited factors (by six of the thirteen participants) were related to organizational aspects within the projects, such as improving conditions for teaching practice. Examples included the provision of spaces for lesson preparation and other project-related tasks, as in R11's response: "If we had a project room to work, prepare exams, and read texts, it would help." Another aspect was access to more classroom resources, as mentioned by R8: "Access to multimedia in face-to-face classes, sometimes faulty, if improved – though not dependent on the project – could enhance certain teaching performances and student learning." Subsequently, varied factors were mentioned. Two participants highlighted the importance of prioritizing experience-sharing in the mentoring meetings:

> R13: What greatly contributed to my participation and commitment to the group/project was, above all, the welcoming space I found in the mentoring sessions. The supervisors were always open to hearing about our topics of interest and our needs, and we also had the opportunity to seek help for classroom situations. That is, I believe that prioritizing these exchanges is fundamental for the commitment and participation of current and future teaching assistants in the project.

For two other students, the projects in their current form were already sufficient to engage their participation, with no need for additional factors. Other factors mentioned only once included personal issues (e.g., having more time), opportunities to conduct research, and compensatory measures such as partnerships with German courses that would grant language-learning scholarships.

An important characteristic attributed to CoPs in the specialized literature is the sense of trust among members. For this reason, we sought to understand how confident participants felt with their peers through the question: *"How comfortable do you feel expressing yourself about your classroom practice, your 'mistakes,' difficulties, or successes during the mentoring meetings?"* Respondents were asked to assign a score from 1 to 5, with 1 being "least confident" and 5 "most confident," and to justify their choice. The chart below illustrates the results:

Chart 1: How comfortable do you feel expressing yourself?[12]

Source: Chart generated by Google Forms

We see that twelve participants chose responses "4" or "5," while only one participant selected "2." Among the justifications, the most recurrent aspects were "welcoming," "openness," "comfort," and "learning." Examples include:

R2: I feel welcomed by my supervisor and colleagues. I have never had a problem making mistakes or asking questions.
R3:There is openness, a fraternal environment in which to express myself.
R4: As I said before, we are a very open group. Exchanges about classroom experiences are always welcome.

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[12] All the charts used in this study were generated using the Google Forms platform.

R5: I feel very comfortable, since mistakes always give me the opportunity to improve, and difficulties are part of the process.
R7: The meetings are spaces where I have always felt comfortable sharing with colleagues about my classroom.

Of the thirteen justifications for responses "4" and "5," twelve referenced these aspects. Only one respondent expressed discomfort with "making mistakes," framing it as a personal issue:

R1: It's very personal, but I feel that as a teacher, I cannot make mistakes. However, I am still learning; everything is new. I should be more understanding with myself.
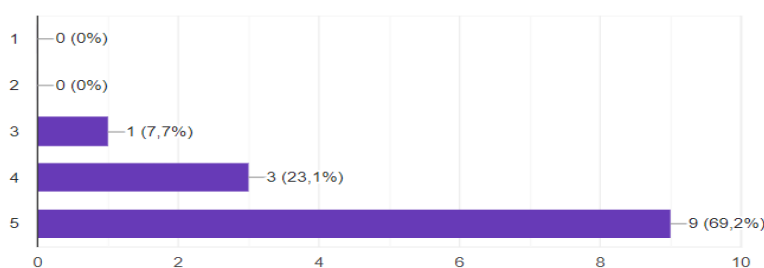
Such responses strongly indicate trust among participants within their groups, along with the recognition that these are spaces primarily intended for exchange and learning. For example:

R6: I do not feel obliged to know everything. I am a student; I am in the phase of learning, discovering, developing, making mistakes… If I don't feel comfortable in a mentoring session, I won't feel comfortable anywhere. The supervising professors are the people I count on for these issues, and they are competent in helping resolve difficulties.

The aspects of "trust" and "awareness" about the space for exchange also bring pedagogical mentoring sessions closer to the defining characteristics of CoPs, as seen in Wenger's and other scholars' work.

Regarding question 6, "How would you evaluate your commitment to the group/project?", participants were once again asked to assign a score from 1 to 5, with 1 representing "least committed" and 5 "most committed," and to justify their choice. Below we present the chart showing the results:

Chart 2: Como você avalia o seu comprometimento com o grupo/ com o projeto?

1	0 (0%)
2	0 (0%)
3	1 (7,7%)
4	3 (23,1%)
5	9 (69,2%)

Source: Chart generated by Google FormsForms

Twelve of the thirteen participants selected options 4 or 5, while only one respondent chose 3, indicating a medium level of commitment. The most frequently recurring terms in the justifications were "effort," "dedication," "attention to the group," and "doing one's best." For example:

> R2: I try to put in maximum effort in my activities to maintain the quality level of the project.
> R4: I believe I am quite dedicated.
> R5: I always try to give my best for the project.
> R8: I try to do my best, but things don't always go as planned.

Some respondents highlighted aspects they believe might hinder their commitment, such as lack of time or unforeseen circumstances:
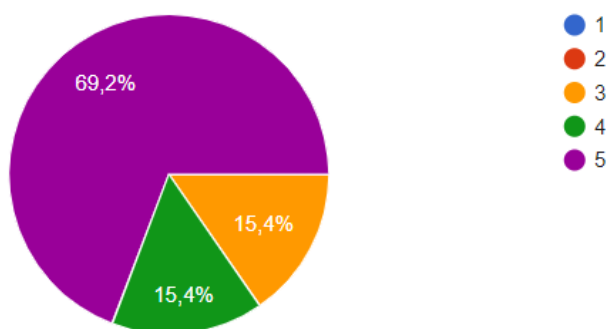
> R9: Despite routine problems and lack of time, I don't see myself distant from the project. I always try to be available for my students and to carry out my activities as a mentor.
> R6: I don't think I'm lacking anything that would make it a 5 instead of a 4, but there are factors beyond my control. I'm human, I have difficulties like anyone else, especially when things are not up to us. In an ideal world, where teachers, students, and interns are properly valued, it would be hard not to be a 5/5. Unfortunately, you can't give 200% to everything, but I do my best to give 100%, which is sufficient, but 'just that'.
> R7: Some absences and missed deadlines can compromise certain tasks.

When asked specifically about the intensity of their participation and engagement in the mentoring sessions (question 7), the results were as follows:

Chart 3: To what extent does the quality of participation influence the group?

Source: Chart generated by Google Forms

For this question, once again, participants were asked to assign a score from 1 to 5. As shown in the chart, 69.2% – that is, nine respondents – selected the highest score (5), while 15.4% – two respondents – chose 3, and another two selected 4. These results indicate that the vast majority of participants consider their engagement in the mentoring sessions to be intense or very intense, which further aligns these sessions with the perspective of CoPs. Among the justifications for choosing high engagement scores, the most frequently cited reason was consistent presence and active participation in the meetings. This tendency appeared in eleven of the thirteen responses and can be illustrated by the following comments:

R2: I always try to attend and participate in the meetings. They are always very interesting.
R9: I believe I am well engaged. I always comment, participate, and share my ideas during the sessions.
R11: I attend mentoring sessions, read the texts, complete the tasks, and reflect on my classroom practice.
R12: I try to always be present, as it is a time that 'clarifies' doubts, when texts are discussed and experiences—both from supervisors and peers—are shared.

Although few responses deviate from this trend, it is noteworthy that one participant mentioned not always being 100% attentive during the discussions: "Sometimes I don't know how to explain certain things, and other times someone else has already said what I thought. Occasionally, I don't pay as much attention as I should" (R8).

Another response highlights greater satisfaction due to the sessions not being devoted solely to experience sharing, which may indicate that content diversification during the meetings is welcomed by participants: "This semester I am very happy with the orientations, because while sharing reports is necessary, it cannot occupy the entirety of the meetings, otherwise it just becomes a chat" (R3).

Only one respondent appeared not to demonstrate engagement in the pedagogical orientations, based on the perception that they are not always important or interesting: "I don't think it is entirely necessary to meet every week. Sometimes I feel there isn't much to say, and a conversation on WhatsApp would be just as effective" (R6). Another respondent justified their "adequate" or "average" participation (rating "3" for the

intensity of participation in the questionnaire) as follows: "Sometimes I don't know how to explain certain things, and other times someone else has already said what I thought. Occasionally, I don't pay as much attention as I should" (R8).

These explanations   complementing the choice of ratings from 1 to 5 exemplify the different levels of participation described in the literature on CoPs, which suggests that participation can vary according to, for instance, interest in a particular topic, as well as external factors such as emotional states. It is also expected that not all members of CoPs participate with the same intensity at all times; they may occupy either a central, active position within the community or a peripheral, less active one. Participation can fluctuate for various reasons.

However, an interesting finding from question 9, "Do you agree that the quality of your participation can influence the group's learning process?" is that the vast majority selected the highest rating (5, "very much"). This shows that, although participation levels may naturally vary, they are universally recognized as a decisive factor in the group's learning. This indicates that most respondents are aware of this, with only two participants selecting "3" ("medium"), which relativizes the importance of participation for learning within the group. Among the explanations for ratings from 1 to 5, only one response diverged from the general tone, which emphasized the importance of each member's participation for the growth of the group, the very reason for its existence. Respondent 6 explained their position regarding whether the quality of their participation influences the group's learning process:

R6: As a teacher in training, yes. If I am not a good teacher, how can I expect my classes to learn? As a colleague, no! I am fully responsible for my actions, and the behavior of classmates, coworkers, or interns is not a motivation for anything. Each person is their own person   , and I am me.

Thus, his/her comment indicates that, as a "teacher in training," he/she agrees that his/her participation influences the group's learning; however, as a "colleague," he/she does not. We interpret this as the participant asserting that he/she do not recognize his/her peers' actions as having an influence on himself/herself or others, attributing responsibility for learning and participation to individual agency. Nevertheless, this does not appear to be the perception of the majority, who demonstrate awareness of the

projects' organic nature, recognizing that each member's actions decisively affect the group's proper functioning. Some responses illustrating this understanding are provided below:

> R2: In a presentation, for example, the content is delivered to everyone, and in this way, we share a knowledge inventory. The quality of this inventory is directly influenced by my participation, as well as by others'.
> R3: I agree. The idea of the meetings is to be a moment for collective debate and growth, so I believe participation is fundamental to the learning process.
> R4: Absolutely! Since each participant has different levels and experiences, the quality of my participation is essential to the group's learning process.
> R5: I learn a lot from the other members; the issues   or questions   that arise are always important to me. I pay attention and try to apply ideas from these exchanges, which is why I believe my own participation contributes to the group as well.
> R7: Yes, completely. The proposed activities and discussions are intended for our development and positively impact the group's learning process.
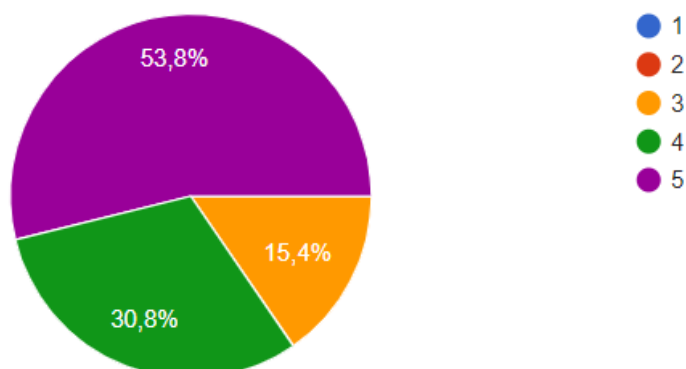> R12: Yes, the group works through exchanges.

Therefore, the research question posed at the beginning of this study can be answered: Do the undergraduate participants perceive themselves as members of communities (of practice or learning), or do they tend to view their learning and training individually? The findings show that the vast majority of respondents perceive the project groups as communities (whether of practice or learning), emphasizing that learning is fundamentally social, resulting from collective sharing and participation.

The literature on CoPs appears to agree on the autonomous nature of members' participation, often explained by the genuine desire to integrate into the community. To better observe this disposition or desire among participants, the last question (question 8) asked, "How do you evaluate your enthusiasm regarding your participation in the project and the activities you carry out as a teacher in the project?" The level of enthusiasm is understood as an important indicator of motivation for more intense participation in the projects or orientation sessions. The table below presents the results:

Chart 4: How Participants Evaluate Their Enthusiasm in the Project

Source: Chart generated by Google Forms

Thus, we can see that two respondents (15.4%) indicated "medium" enthusiasm, while four (30.8%) selected a rating of 4 (indicating "enthusiasm"), and five (53.8%) indicated "high enthusiasm" regarding their participation in the project and the activities they perform as teachers. Among the comments explaining medium enthusiasm, two examples relate to the length of time the participant has been involved in the project, which may have made some topics seem repetitive, and the fact that one class was closed due to low enrollment, leaving the participant temporarily without teaching duties:

R1: Having participated for a while now, I felt more motivated at the beginning.
R2: I enjoy preparing and critiquing lesson plans, and having a perspective on readings and knowledge. However, at the moment I have no class, so I cannot carry out activities.

Among the other eleven responses justifying their enthusiasm, one respondent highlighted factors that would make them even more motivated: "Well, I would like better support from the project, both with scholarships and the quality of the classes, for example, premium accounts for group activities" (R8).

The remaining respondents expressed great enthusiasm for the project. Notable responses include:

R3: I am constantly enthusiastic about participating in the project. Being a teacher is a great opportunity and something I truly want to do so, I am happy and excited about this work.
R4: Very enthusiastic! I love being part of [project name]! Being a teacher in the project and contributing to society is immeasurable!

R6: I LOVE being in the classroom and discovering and reinventing myself. Seeing my development over two semesters in [project name] shows me how valuable experimentation is. My students' responses are also rewarding! Receiving each positive response shows I am on the right path.
R12: I feel very motivated; it is an incredible project that greatly contributes to my teacher training.

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) emphasize enthusiasm as a key driver for mobilizing individuals in CoPs, highlighting the voluntary nature of participation. Considering that participation in the project's orientation sessions is not voluntary, fostering and maintaining members' enthusiasm seems even more challenging. According to the questionnaire responses, most participants demonstrate enthusiasm for the projects, aligning these groups with one of the core principles of CoPs. Regarding enthusiasm, bell hooks (2017) also emphasizes the concept in discussing "learning communities" (HOOKS 2017:18), highlighting it as a key factor for community development: "The capacity to generate enthusiasm is profoundly affected by our interest in one another, by listening to each other, and by recognizing each other's presence" (HOOKS 2017:17). We agree that this assertion is also applicable to the groups formed in the projects discussed here.

7 Final Considerations

Although, for more than twenty years, legislation has emphasized the need and importance of teacher education programs to organically integrate theory and practice from the very beginning of undergraduate studies, this can still pose a challenge, particularly in the training of teachers for the instruction of minoritized languages (LAGARES 2018; SILVA 2017), such as German. Consequently, in the pursuit of this integration, many universities invest in extension projects focused on teaching and professional training, as exemplified by the projects analyzed in this study. In this context, our aim was to briefly present two extension projects from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the State University of Rio de Janeiro, highlighting as their core component the promotion of a welcoming space for initial teacher training and professional development through the exchange of experiences among participants.

To discuss this space, we relied on the concept of communities of practice, seeking to understand the aspects that most closely align or diverge from the assumptions underlying the extension projects investigated. The specialized literature indicates that the most prominent characteristics of CoPs include the predominance of trust among participants, who feel comfortable expressing doubts and insecurities, as well as the sharing of a collective awareness that views groups as valuable spaces for knowledge construction from a decentralized and horizontal perspective, in which everyone teaches and learns from one another.

The analysis of our *corpus*, composed of participants' responses to an online questionnaire, demonstrated that the aspects described above are reflected in the statements and comments of the respondents. It can also be affirmed that there seems to be convergence regarding the enthusiasm demonstrated toward participation in the projects and in the pedagogical orientation sessions within their scope. On the other hand, as points of divergence, we can highlight the mandatory participation of the extension students in both projects' weekly sessions, which may imply less autonomy than desired or even expected in the context of CoPs, as reported in the literature.

Another point that warrants further reflection in the context of these projects concerns the duration of students' participation, as some responses indicated that the longevity of certain students' involvement appears to reduce their enthusiasm and engagement, potentially negatively affecting their participation.

Future studies could focus on the graduates of both projects, aiming to understand the impact of undergraduate participation on their training as well as their future professional lives. Additionally, such studies could explore how alumni evaluate these projects from a retrospective perspective, including their perception of the greatest benefits observed in relation to their professional practice, as well as potential gaps or aspects that, in their view, might have deserved greater attention within these spaces.

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Data availability statement

All data presented in this study have been published in the article itself.