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The formation of teaching logic: a study on Franco-Brazilian teaching knowledge and practices*

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to propose a new way of understanding teaching based on the term teaching logic, in other words, a principle of justice comprising teaching knowledge and mobilised by teachers in their professional activities. The drawing up of this concept was inspired by pragmatic sociology and by the following questions: what would the action logics be that guide the conduct of teachers? Are the same action logics deployed by teachers in different sociocultural contexts? Would it be possible to find similarities between the principles of justice of French and Brazilian professionals? To answer these questions, field observations were carried out and 36 Brazilian and French teachers were invited to describe professional situations in semi-structured interviews. The analysis of scenarios linked to teachers' real activities reveals that although there is a plurality of logics, there is a tendency to use a civic logic in France and a liberal logic in Brazil. The discussion of this result demonstrates that action logics are limited to privileged justice criteria in national contexts. Nevertheless, it was possible to conclude that, even in different sociocultural settings, there is professional knowledge shared by teachers in both countries, which are translated into principles of justice and comprise a teaching action logic.

Keywords

Teaching practices – Teaching logic – Professionalism – Comparative education – Teacher professional socialisation.

* The author take full responsibility for the translation of the text, including titles of books/articles and the quotations originally published in Portuguese.

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Introduction

The discussions presented in this article were motivated by the results of PhD research² and international research called “Religion, discrimination and racism in the school environment”^{3,4}, coordinated by Françoise Lantheaume (Université Lumière Lyon 2) and financed by DILCRAH⁵. The multidisciplinary research involves Brazilian, French, Canadian and Swiss elements. The issue of teaching practices is the central theme of this study, which seeks to understand how teachers act in situations that are ordinary and, simultaneously, unpredictable.

Based on the sociology of the work, one of our assumptions is that learning in the teaching profession takes place mainly during professional activities with more experienced peers and in an interpersonal way, *based on* work situations, *in* work situations and *because of* work situations (FRANCQ, 1996). It is a process that has the social intention of enhancing the profession, establishing some specific knowledge of the occupation (WITORSKI; BRIQUET-DUHAZÉ, 2005). Tardif and Lessard (1999) highlight the syncretic nature of the teaching profession, in the sense that everyday action consists of a broad scope of knowledge and *savoir-faires*. We can thus understand that teaching knowledge and practices are two sides of the same coin, in other words, teaching knowledge is applied in teaching practices and, simultaneously, teaching practices allow the construction of new professional knowledge.

Of the vast number of fields of teaching knowledge, the one that we are highlighting for this reflection is knowing how to react skilfully to the unpredictability of school situations. In actual fact, when an adult is with a group of children in a classroom, during a class period, it is not possible to know what can happen in that space and time as it involves social interactions. In this way, issues correlated to the theme of international research, namely, religion, discrimination and racism that sometimes touch the sensibilities of individuals, can emerge in an unpredictable way from the discussion of the content, of media news or politics, from a debate amongst students, in the relationship between parents and teachers, etc. In this sense, we ask ourselves what values are behind the knowledge and teaching practices in professional situations.⁶ To support this question theoretically, we use pragmatic sociology.

Teaching practices established upon principles of justice

Based on theories of political philosophy, the authors of pragmatic sociology (NACHI, 2012) identify principles of justice based on a moral conception, which would be mobilised in human behaviour. To understand the symbolic and axiological mediation between moral conception and action, the authors use the concept of cities/*cités* (BOLTANSKI;

2- The PhD research was funded by FAPESP, process number 2015/22243-8. See references in Valente (2019).

3- Research website: <https://redisco.hypotheses.org/>

4- The research followed the standards of CNS resolution 510/2016 regarding ethics in research with human beings and it included a freely given informed consent form signed by all the teachers interviewed.

5- Délégation Interministérielle à la Lutte Contre le Racisme, l'Antisémitisme et la Haine anti-LGBT (Interministerial Delegation to fight racism, anti-Semitism and anti-LGBT hatred). The translation of this article into English was also financed by this institution.

6- Excluding situations involving the relationship between teaching practices and student learning.

THÉVENOT, 1991). The cities/*cités* would be justice standards that precede the actors and allow them to take a practical stance. Thus, collectively conceived, the principles of justice guide human conduct from an individual appropriation.

The situations involve a “set of interactions between people and between them and objects” (LANTHEAUME, 2008, p. 17) and foster the understanding of the principles of justice of the subjects researched based on different courses of action. The course of action of interest to this study is, in the main, the model of justice, in which objects and people are involved who seek references to justify actions they deem to be fair, in addition to reporting injustices.

By stimulating action, the principles of justice and the common good mobilise certain values of the subjects that are not always coherent, but in order to analyse these principles, pragmatic sociology suggests ideal models in order to better comprehend them. These model types are called action logics, which allow the analysis of human action taking into consideration the actor’s relationship with objects and with the sense of justice. The action logics refer to the models of cities/*cités* created by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) and are based upon a particular conception of the common good.

We can thus identify the principles of justice and the action logics through the description and justification provided by the actor to explain his/her behaviour in a given situation. Hence, the practice itself is not necessarily shared, but the purpose of the action and the way to engage in the activity that respect the conventions of the social group, as these are criteria that organise the social and political world of the actors and guide those actions likely to produce a desirable effect. Boltanski with Thévenot (1991) and Chiapello (1999) thus suggest seven cities/*cités*.

The collective, universalism, general interest, equal rights and respect for the rules of the democratic system are part of the civic city/*cit*é which assumes a homonymous action logic. The civic logic is an individual action logic and, simultaneously, a political logic (GAUTHERIN, 2005). Respect for the family, rites and traditions are prioritised in the domestic city/*cit*é. The relationship between the actors, in this case, is one of proximity, but there is an authority that needs to be respected, for its wisdom and experience. The search for the best performance and the best technique, seeking efficiency and productivity, reveal an action logic that corresponds to the industrial city/*cit*é. In the inspired city/*cit*é creativity, authenticity and originality prevail as principles. Vocation or talent are present. For the actors, it is essential that this action logic transgresses the rules in the name of spontaneity. In terms of marketing logic, the justification is guided by the spirit of competition, with the desire to possess corresponding to the common good. Celebrity, renown, the recognition of an individual by his/her peers is what is cherished in the city/*cit*é of opinion. The action logic within the connectionist city/*cit*é would represent the new spirit of capitalism, in which mobility and the ability to connect in a network to execute projects is what underlies the action (BOLTANSKI; CHIAPELLO, 1999).

A rereading of pragmatic sociology allows Gautherin (2005) to add two further action logics which are based on a political (and not philosophical) model: the liberal action logic suggests respect for individual rights; thus, the freedom of each actor takes precedence over equality. The second one is the community logic, whose founding principle is the

recognition of the individual as belonging to a community, opposing the common good of the group when placed before the common good of modern society.

Actors choose their action model by testing themselves and others in social interaction. The result of this test contributes to the creation of a behaviour model, legitimising it and making it social. Social reality, in turn, gives meaning to individual practices. We can thus understand that the action logic is reflexively chosen by individuals during the situation, taking into account factors such as: the interaction with human and non-human actors that integrate them, individual dispositions and the effects of previous socialisations. Hence, the socialisation process, prior to the time of the situation, is used as a device for the selection of the action logic and, in turn, the results of this choice will have socialising effects.

Studies of the sociology of justification based on principles of justice transformed the initial question into the following inquiries: what are the action logics that guide the conduct of teachers? Are the same action logics deployed by teachers in different sociocultural contexts? Would it be possible to find similarities between the principles of justice of French and Brazilian professionals?

To answer these questions, we conducted semi-structured interviews with eighteen Brazilian teachers and the same number of French teachers⁷. This research tool was chosen due to the centrality of the real professional activity of teachers, their behaviour in school situations and the ways in which they justify their teaching practices. During the interviews, teachers were invited to report school situations involving social and cultural diversity. The words religion, discrimination and racism were not used at first, with the objective of knowing the specific types of teachers. Semi-structured interviews were carried out individually with volunteer teachers in the school space.

In addition, 250 hours of field observations were carried out in Brazilian and French schools between 2016 and 2018. Carried out in public teaching establishments, with the consent of the teachers, the observations followed the sociological ethnography protocol, in which the actions of the actors are understood in the relationship with other actors, with the context, history, with the life trajectories and with the values of each individual. The field diary was used for taking notes in the schools and then for keeping a meticulous record. The observations allowed for a comparative work to be carried out, as we would not have the authority to speak of teaching practices using only theoretical or discursive elements. In this manner, we use the perspective of comparative education, which does not foresee an item-by-item comparison, we take into account the internal and external cultural complexity of the countries and we correlate different perspectives to comprehend the social phenomena and, more specifically, elements of the professionalism of the teachers interviewed.

Following in the footsteps of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991), the aim of this article is *to take a general approach* towards identifying the action logics, in other words, to view the data with an aviator's eye, seeking out that which can be generalised and is collective based on the data gathered. Unfortunately, the length of an article does not

7- More specifically, the study was carried out in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, and in the city of Lyon, France. Although we are aware that it is not possible to generalise, we chose to distinguish the two social realities based on nationalities.

allow for material analysis and reflection. The explanation of the data and the analysis are the subject of previous publications, as well as the discussion of the theme of social and cultural diversity (VALENTE, 2019).

The analysis of 109 situations⁸ described by the teachers resulted in the verification of the existence of a plurality of logic in the situations, but when we compare the data, we see a tendency to mobilise civic and liberal logics in French teaching practices and liberal and domestic logics in Brazilian teaching practices. To discuss this research result, the text follows with an argument about the plurality of the logics. We then go on to discuss that these logics do not correspond only to the microsocial level of the institution or the classroom, but are related to the principles of justice prioritised in societies on a macrosocial scale. Finally, we argue about the existence of a justice criterion specific to professional teaching practices, which we call the teaching logic.

Plurality of action logics

The analysis of the situations revealed that the liberal and domestic logics are combined in most Brazilian school situations. In France, the civic logic becomes plural when combined with the liberal logic. The plurality of action logics in the two educational systems is justified because:

The school is unavoidably situated within a universe where the regulation principles are multiple and it must find a way of regulating that takes into account this plurality. The compromise between the different principles cannot be made on a national scale. In this regard, it is very demanding: the commitment must be perfectly justified in all reference universes. (DEROUET, 1992, p. 62, our translation).

According to the same author, the plurality of action logics present in the behaviour of teachers depends on specific local aspects, but also on the unique aspects of social configurations. The principles of justice mobilised in teaching practices are different in the cases of these two countries and the permanent and implicit negotiation between the plural values results in a balance between the different logics and their justifications.

Within a complex universe of justification like the school, each individual is likely to participate in a situation using different justice references and to move from one justice reference to another, in order to adapt to the social context (DEROUET, 1992). The plurality of references is directly linked to the situation experienced by the teacher, but also to the resources he/she has at his/her disposal, which, in turn, are associated with the individual dispositions conceived during their life trajectories and the construction of identity and professional shaping during their professional socialisation process (DUBAR, 2005). The fact of switching from one logic to another is not an inconvenience for the teachers, as they do it with great ease and skill. This shows the plasticity of teachers' actions or the ease with which their dispositions are adaptable and the professional norms

8- It was not possible to present the situations due to the limitations of the article, but they can be consulted in Valente (2019).

are rendered flexible. These characteristics are considered here as teaching knowledge which allows a *pragmatic* relationship between individuals and the principles of justice, which are applied according to their collective needs and interests to recompose or create, based on their knowledge, forms of appropriating the professionals' norms (DUBET, 2014).

Liberal and domestic logics in Brazil

Although there are no previous studies which confirm the prevalence of the liberal logic in the Brazilian educational field, other elements do confirm this result. One of them would be related with the structure of Brazilian society which, as a weak southern State (MARTUCCELLI, 2010), makes individuals responsible for their fundamental rights, such as health and education. Aware of the individual effort required, Brazilians accept, tolerate and (re) produce the Brazilian way, rendering social ties and the relationship between individuals more valuable than legal norms. The coexistence between legal injunctions and an individualistic relational culture are features of the complex Brazilian reality.

A second aspect is related with the North American media influences and the economic and political relationships with the country, representing the apogee of the liberal logic reproduced by the United States. The logic of the *self-made man* associated with the idea of the existence of individual merit to be successful is current in Brazilian discourse, including that of teachers. Then, the liberal logic would provide individuals with the conditions that would make the hybridization of the *habitus* disposition possible (SETTON, 2012), as each individual is shaped through multiple and mismatched references.

Finally, a study on how secularity is defined in Brazil (MENARD; VALENTE, 2016) reveals the existence of a liberal logic manifested in the imagination of this social configuration. Hence, the social structure and some comprehension of social phenomena would drive a liberal world view in Brazil. In general, in the teachers' speech, the liberal logic is displayed in the category of respect and individual freedom, which would justify their behaviour.

However, the domestic logic was also identified in everyday/overall action, especially from field observation. The existence of this logic could be explained by the history of Brazilian education, especially with regard to the shortcomings in public policies for the training and professionalisation of teachers (GATTI *et al.*, 2019). In addition to the historical element, we identified that the concern of Brazilian teachers with the well-being and schooling of students (especially needy students) generates a rapprochement between teachers and students as a teaching strategy to ensure the schooling of minors. This teaching strategy is made explicit not only in conversations with students, but also in the soft touch and the pronouns used in the way teachers and students address each other (especially the younger ones), as noted by Paulo Freire (1997) more than two decades ago, creating a family environment.

When asked about their actions based on domestic logic, teachers generally have difficulties in justifying this behaviour. The absence of an explanation for the action

is identified here as a product of the normalisation of this attitude acquired through professional socialisation. It is a professional conduct incorporated and transmitted to peers in a legitimate manner and ends up proposing an action plan that is considered ideal, which can work when a minimum distance is established in the teacher-student relationship, but it can also have unwelcome consequences., as in the case where the teacher-student relationship is characterised by the challenge of authority.

In this way, Brazilian teachers mainly employ two action logics: liberal and domestic. The focus on the individual and the tendency to close relationships are linked to social influences from public and economic policies not only geared towards education. As we understand it, teachers seek action strategies that involve knowledge from their life trajectories and knowledge deriving from exercises for a creative action following the principles that they uphold, such as individual freedom, respect for others, protection of students, emotional learning and the enhancement of school education.

Civic and liberal logics in France

In his research Derouet (1992) found the civic logic to be a privileged action logic in French teaching practices in the republican school. According to the author, this logic was predominant until sociological studies began to deconstruct the idea that school would be a means of social climbing. From then on, the debate is about equal opportunities, prioritising the principle of equity. In this context, other action logics are also represented, creating a complex universe of justification. In this way, concurrently with the civic logic, the author identified the community, efficiency (industrial), inspired and market logics, in order of frequency (DEROUE, 1992).

The French educational scenario of the 1990's went through decentralisation and began to be represented by the link between the general and the private, between the principles of action and local everyday conduct. The association between education and the republic is no longer as evident as it was before this historical period, but the need for a general principle remains present in teaching practices to justify the actions. However, Derouet (1992) does not talk about a liberal logic, probably because this concept is not used by the authors of pragmatic sociology⁹. We identified it as the second logic most frequently used in situations described by the teachers interviewed. In our interpretation, the shift to the liberal logic would be characteristic of the historical social context and the history of the profession, which proposes an appreciation of the individual as being responsible for his/her own learning. This shift occurs, in part, based on the debate about interculturality, since the liberal logic would be a form of commitment in which the individual is valued and, at the same time, allows teachers to find resources that address, on the one hand, the laws, the curricular stipulations and the universal and, on the other hand, the recognition of individual identities to manage situations (LANTHEAUME, 2007) in order to facilitate school learning.

9- The concept is used by the sociologist Gautherin (2005), who uses pragmatic sociology as a reference.

The marked presence of the liberal logic in the two sociocultural configurations studied could be explained by the influence of liberalism and capitalism on the model and on school logics as a whole. From an economist's logic, education becomes a system that reproduces social asymmetries and regulates certain socialisation mechanisms, notably the political and ideological ones for the formation of conforming citizens (RESENDE, 2005).

From the individual action logic to the contextualised action logic

We were inspired by Thévenot's (2001) engagement regimes to understand that the specific action of an individual adapts to his/her close collective, in other words, the people with whom he/she interacts based on a certain logic or action model. Hence, sociocultural configurations, even being embedded in a process of globalisation and the coexistence of different types of values, are endowed with specific aspects and propose socially shared ways of being and living in society, or, in Dubet's words (2014, p. 177), "each principle of justice structures a type of representation of society".

Action logics thus represent conceptions of the common good that go beyond individual human action. They are produced and provoke specific socialisation effects in each of the social contexts, influencing the shaping of national identities. And so, the mobilisation of certain principles of justice is not only related with the situation in its microcosm and to social and professional interaction in its mesocosm, but it is also connected to a form of national socialisation that, through its different socialising institutions, offers principles of justice to its citizens.

By identifying the socialisation process as a plural space endowed with multiple references, these tendencies towards *modus operandi* based on certain values are the result of a combination of pedagogical efforts between socialising instances that work to consolidate a way of relating to judgment categories which are socially legitimised. Without losing sight of the actor, we should remember that it is up to the individual as a reflective agent, in other words, one who has a unique participation in the construction of the social reality and in the construction of oneself, to combine and articulate the different references to give meaning to their practices and social experiences.

However, as the actor scarcely knows national realities different from his/her own, the institutionally proposed reference principles are rarely questioned. In this regard, in a situation, the plurality of logics does not cease to exist, but the specific social configuration would provide a tendency towards the prevalence of an action logic, even if plural, and towards a specific socialization for each country studied.

In this way, the school institution is, together with other institutions, another instrument for the transmission of national values. The action logics prioritised in each sociocultural configuration are present in the school and in the actions of the teachers, since the observation and reiteration of these behaviours form part of the existing learning methods. In actual fact, there is no single way of being a teacher and different perspectives can contribute to a broad interpretation of the world. Thus, the identification of trends in the teaching practice of the interviewed teachers is interpreted here as the effects of a professional teaching socialisation, but also of a national socialisation.

As a counter-argument, we would emphasise here the role of the culture of the school establishment. Such a culture may represent the possibility that there is no correspondence between the action logic prioritised in a situation and the action logic identified at national level. We refer here specifically to the case in which a school where the main action logic of teachers in a situation is civic due to favourable working conditions, although in other school contexts in Brazil there is a prevalence of the liberal logic.

Hence, the professional socialisation of teachers, involved in the melting pot of the sociocultural configuration of each country, sees equality as the privileged value in the French educational system, characterising a civic logic, followed by a liberal logic. In the Brazilian educational system, individual freedom has greater weight, indicating the prevalence of a liberal logic alongside domestic logic. It is worth remembering that this generalisation is valid for the present and is undergoing transformations because it is a social process. These trends do not mean that there is homogeneity in the way teachers act, but it is the upshot of the quest for agreements about standards and practices in a profession that is marked by diversity.

Teaching logic: part and parcel of the teaching profession

Pragmatic regimes, for Thévenot (2001, p. 7), are social instruments that “guide the individual’s involvement with the social environment, explaining the moral notion of good and how it can be included in reality” (our translation). The situations analysed reveal that teachers share values and standards that would be intrinsic to teaching ethics and that serve to clarify decision-making and guide teachers in their actions. Teaching practices could thus be classified as a regime of the profession, even if there are influences from external elements on the professional’s behaviour. This result leads to a reflection on the possibility of the existence of an action logic specific to school situations and teaching practices.

The action logics identified in the professional practice of the teachers interviewed are insufficient to represent the reference principles of justice present in their discourse. The fair order of teaching practice, in general, is based on a scientific/curricular, rational and critical truth and the definition of the common good is linked to the universalisation of knowledge to ensure social inclusion, schooling and student learning. We would thus suggest the introduction of an action logic in which schooling is the measure of greatness, in other words, he/she is great who reaches the competences that are required by the school to remain in the institution and continue their studies, even if they are not the best students. This justice methodology is related to the rational autonomy of knowledge and its universal access. In our analysis, we observe these higher general conventions in the practice of most of the teachers interviewed, regardless of their nationality, paying greater attention to the discourse of more experienced teachers.

Against the backdrop of this ideal action logic, fairness is translated by the conveyance of a truth legitimised by the scientific community, taking into account the conditions of schooling of students according to their social and cultural characteristics and, therefore, the interaction with the student is viewed positively. Knowledge is valued as a way of guaranteeing one’s own freedom (the liberal logic) and that of others, in addition to promoting the debate for building a better and more egalitarian society (the

civic logic). However, the teaching logic is not limited to the association between two logics, as it accrues, on the one hand, knowledge specific to the profession, such as the management of teaching autonomy, the flexibility to deal with the unexpected and the use of strategies and actions adapted to situations, implying, at times, the mobilisation of intermediary normativities (LANTHEAUME; SIMONIAN, 2012). On the other hand, with regard to the subjectivity of teachers, democratic and collective values are accrued, an intrinsic benevolence of the proxy activity of the teacher, related to giving, cooperating, recognising, protecting and valuing students.

However, it should be borne in mind that “there is no gift without the expectation of reward, multiplication or legitimation of a belief [...] and of a symbolic power” (SETTON, 2012, p. 50). In this sense, the mobilisation of the teaching logic, on the part of teachers, would be related with the recognition of the social function of the teaching profession and the attestation that their work has a value for society, in other words, as a social position (profession) and as an activity (transmission of knowledge, values and meanings). In this way, the teaching logic is a socialising instrument that values and legitimises the school method (VINCENT, 1994) as a monopoly of knowledge and social success of the individual-student based on schooling.

This behaviour would originate from dispositions incorporated by the teachers through professional socialisation, which starts in their schooling through the observation of their own teachers. This is not to say that professional teacher socialisation processes are similar in both countries, but the characteristics of modern education systems, which are identified according to the educational-teaching paradigm (VINCENT, 1994), could be a justification for valuing a similar teaching action logic in two different social contexts, which allows the imposition of discipline on students and argumentation regarding the existence of the school and the transmission of knowledge.

The teaching action logic reaffirms a collective representation of education as Paideia and a belief in the school institution as the solution to social problems. In this regard, this logic would be linked to the principle not only of justice, but also of cohesion that allows teachers to make sense of their individual practices in a modern educational reality, reconnecting a social and professional identity to a subjective and socialising experience and identifying the teaching practice as a political act.

In summary, the main characteristics of this action logic are the intrinsic benevolence of the teaching profession, the observation of students as social beings in a learning situation, the recognition of students' intellectual skills (ZANTEN *et al.*, 2002), the appreciation of the propagation of knowledge associated with the idealisation of education and the identification of this principle of justice as a characteristic of the profession. The teaching logic would represent a possible compromise that would alleviate the tension identified by Derouet (1992) between democratisation, rationality and justice, on the one hand, and love and respect for childhood, on the other.

Final remarks

Teaching practices and knowledge derive from a hybridisation of skills and dispositions acquired during the life experience trajectory of teachers and resources that are available in their often-unpredictable professional situation. However, teachers make little use of resources that are *imposed*, in other words, those that are not created by them. The search for a balance between what is the norm and the actual profession means that intermediary normativity forms part of the deontological activity of the teaching profession, as well as the identity plasticity and creative action that serves as the foundation for the creation and invention of teaching work, making it a source of pleasure (HÉLOU; LANTHEAUME, 2008). In this sense, based on reflexivity and previous experiences, teachers are the producers of the knowledge necessary for their own profession, even if they are not recognised as such (TARDIF; LESSARD; LAHAYE, 1991).

The appreciation of knowledge, skills and teaching practices also involves their study. The principles of justice and the action logic developed by pragmatic sociology make it possible to identify and analyse real situations in the daily lives of teachers and to help focus on teaching professionalism as central to the construction of knowledge and professional competences. Said theoretical contribution allowed us to understand that the action logics prioritised in each country are not restricted to school situations, but it is a principle of action that can be found in other social dimensions. This result draws attention to the cultural dimension of the teaching profession in each country, which was only possible to identify through an approach based on comparative education, analysing the performance of Brazilian and French professionals.

We can thus conclude that the choice of the action logic of teachers depends on previous knowledge and skills that are acquired, created and built from the characteristics of this profession, the institutional, cultural and political context, the relationship and interaction with colleagues and students or, basically, from the professional socialisation process. Although the professional socialisation processes in each country are different, we have identified standards of justice that are common to the practices of teachers on both sides of the Atlantic, which prioritise the education of students, seek scientific knowledge and legitimise the schooling method. We call this behaviour teaching logic which, constituted by and for teachers, allows for a better understanding of the teaching activity as it is part and parcel of the process of professional socialisation.

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