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# SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF UNDERGRADUATES ABOUT TEACHER IDENTITY AND WORK

## A gender perspective

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*This study discusses data collected from undergraduates in pedagogy and teacher training degree programmes on their representations of teacher identity and work. The study is part of a project being developed by the International Centre of Studies on Social Representations and Subjectivity – Education (CIERS-ed), whose objective is to identify how these students define their future practice through analysis of their social representations of teaching work. The study is based on the theory of social representations proposed by Serge Moscovici (2003). Two methods of data collection were used: the «formation of groups» task and the «directed word classification» task. The results indicate that male and female students share some representations about teaching. There were also indications of differences according to students' gender and type of course.*

**Keywords:** social representations, gender, teaching work, identity

### Introduction

Stereotypes can be defined as beliefs about the characteristics of a certain group of people which allow definition of this group in a simplified, consensual and economic manner (Deschamps & Moliner, 2008). Gender stereotypes dominate people's lives, predisposing men and women to act and react in accordance with widespread rules and norms of conduct and behaviour. Professional stereotypes can have the same effect on people's lives. As far as tea-

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ching is concerned, some stereotypes are hard to challenge and may reflect «common sense» knowledge of what it is to be a good teacher. Yannoulas (1996) discussed the idea that females are considered better teachers than males, especially when assigned to the lower year groups. Louro (1997b) thought about the different functions male and female teachers have in schools, and how distinct expectations about the work of teaching influence their career aspirations. This may be the case, since teaching is associated in many societies with activities traditionally regarded as female, such as caring (Hoffman, 2003; Fischman, 2007; Barletto, 2008). Another study shows that vocation and affection, which are strongly associated with female work, constitute the representation of teaching and that this representation impacts on the models adopted in teacher training in Brazil (Barreto, 2010). As Archer and Lloyd (1992: 237) pointed out, «stereotypes reinforce the idea that there is “men’s work” and “women’s work”, thereby influencing gender differences in occupational training, opportunity and levels of aspiration». The feminisation of this profession and the association of gender and professional stereotypes may explain the over-representation of graduate females in positions as teachers and their under-representation in positions as school principals (Demartini & Antunes, 2002; Gomes, 2007).

In addition, the studies of Gatti and Barreto (2009) and Gatti (2011) concerning the main variables involved in the characterisation, training and professionalisation of teachers in Brazil showed that from 2005 to 2009 the number of undergraduates attending pedagogy courses, which certify teachers to lower year groups, increased by 30% and that the vast majority of these (92.5%) were female. A high proportion of these students (68.6%) were enrolled in evening courses, 40.8% of them worked, contributing to family income, and 49.1% came from the lower middle class. Students enrolled in teacher training programmes, which certify teachers to higher grades in specific disciplines, had similar characteristics. In the teaching of languages, 82.8% were female and were also classified as lower middle class. Around 31.8% of them worked, contributing to family income, and 60% were enrolled in evening courses at universities which, according to the authors, are less rigorous and not of such good quality as daytime university courses.

Brazil has seen a great expansion of its higher education system, and, as a consequence, issues regarding teachers’ training processes and professional identity are at the forefront of the academic debate, as can be seen in the works of Vianna (2002), Alves-Mazzotti (2011), and Sousa and Bôas (2011). This study intends to contribute to the understanding of embedded positions of acceptance of, or resistance to, stereotypical views about teaching. Although male and female teachers may share some views about the job of teaching, there may be differences in the way they construct their professional identities and define their needs and expectations. In this article, I reflect on the representations of teacher identity and work drawn from a group of Brazilian male and female undergraduates enrolled in pedagogy and teacher training

degree programmes. This study raises the following questions: How do male and female undergraduates differ in their representations of being a teacher? What are their common views of the role? These questions may enlighten our understanding of the representations affecting their training as teachers and inform researchers and policymakers about ways of changing them.

While some studies have indicated the existence of hegemonic and centralised representations of teacher identity (*ibidem*), others have indicated that these representations are going through a transition phase (Alves-Mazzotti, 2011). In earlier work, Louro (1997a, 1997b) had discussed how images and representations of teacher identity had been changing in Brazil and suggested that, in fact, different teacher identities coexist. Vianna (2002) undertook a different analysis. She identified, among her Brazilian subjects, female signifying practices in teaching activity, regardless of the gender of the person teaching. Similar findings had been observed by Izquierdo (1994), who discussed the engagement of males and females with conventional models of teaching. The author noticed that affection appeared as an important characteristic of teaching in the discourses of both gender groups. Other investigations demonstrated that, during the first decades of the 20th century, contrary to accepting passively the stereotypical views about this occupation, some female teachers stated that they understood the contradictions between an official discourse, which praised women for their missionary work, and the real power that was given to them (Silva, 2002). Garcia, Hypolito, and Vieira (2005) drew attention to the heterogeneous characteristics of teachers in Brazil – they have different qualifications, different working conditions, and carry out their activities in different institutions and systems of education. They also showed that teachers' identity was not a straightforward «one size fits all» official role, but that teachers attempted to negotiate a «best fit» professional sense of self from among a range of variables.

These studies demonstrate that standardised and hegemonic views of teacher identity may coexist with a multiplicity of images and representations of this occupation. This article analyses representations of teacher identity, comparing the relative importance of some hegemonic representations to different gender groups. One of the central arguments is that changes to hegemonic representations may be occurring during teacher training courses in different sub-groups of both male and female subjects.

## **Theoretical framework**

This study is based on the theory of social representations proposed by Serge Moscovici (2003, 2008) which allows an understanding of the tensions between social and individual

domains. For Moscovici (2003), social representations are a body of knowledge, concepts, values, and images that a group of people associates with a phenomenon or subject. Contrary to scientific knowledge, social representations are «common sense» knowledge generated from attempts to understand the new – new ideas, cultures or objects – by associating it with anything that is familiar. They have the function of guiding people’s attitudes towards a social subject and determining inter-individual behaviours and communication (*ibidem*). For Jodelet (1989) and Jovchelovitch (2007), social representations are a form of practical knowledge that links a subject to an object, that is, they are always a representation of something by someone. Therefore, studies in social representations raise questions about what is being said, by whom, how and from where.

In the process of identifying representations, it is important to understand how they have been formed and to observe the mechanisms that maintain their structure. The structural approach to the study of social representations proposed by Abric (1984) allows for the understanding of this organisation. For Abric (*ibidem*), the content of representations is organised around a central nucleus formed by some consensual meanings. The centre is associated with collective memories, resistant to change. Around the centre one finds the peripheral elements, that is, elements that are more sensitive to the immediate context, more flexible.

Gender and profession are ways of classifying people in groups according to certain factors. Along with ethnicity, nationality, and political affiliation, they are important defining aspects of people’s identities (Duveen, 1993, 2001; Cohen-Scali, 2000; Deschamps & Moliner, 2008). Since stereotypes can be thought of as shared opinions about a subject, lending them a close resemblance to social representations, and gender and profession are common categories used as identity «reference points», stereotypes can interfere in people’s judgments and interpretations in respect of other identities, as well as impact on people’s expectations in relation to their own identity.

According to the theory of social representations, judgments regarding professional identity and gender categories would be based on people’s common knowledge of, and beliefs concerning, the right qualities and characteristics that assign individuals to occupational categories. However, as Wagner (2003) demonstrated, representations of a single social object are present in many states of elaboration in different subgroups and contain different aspects of the object. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate the representations of teacher identity and work that are being constructed by students enrolled in pedagogy and teaching degree programmes and to compare male and female views of their future career. Although male and female students may share historically determined representations of teacher identity and work, and gender categories may point to contrasting views of these representations, a closer examination of how hegemonic representations are classified in relation to the

importance they have to different gender groups may point to changes going on in the formation of these representations.

In 2006, the Educational Research Department of Fundação Carlos Chagas (São Paulo, Brazil) created the International Centre of Studies on Social Representations and Subjectivity – Education (CIERS-ed). This has the objective of carrying out scientific research within the field of education through the study of the theory of social representations. One of the projects conducted by CIERS-ed has the objective of identifying how undergraduates in the educational field (pedagogy and teacher training degree programmes) define their future practice. The project addresses this question through the analysis of their social representations of teaching work. A total number of 2,748 undergraduates (1,656 in pedagogy and 1,092 in teacher training degree programmes) from Brazil, Portugal, and Argentina took part in the first phase of a multi-centre study that followed a common methodological procedure. During this phase, students' views on their future profession were obtained and analysed. They were also asked to evoke five words that came to their minds when they heard the following terms: a) teacher, b) pupil, and c) give a lecture. The words evoked were analysed by the software EVOC (2000) based on the Vergès method (1992), which is known to facilitate access to the elements that constitute representations and allow an understanding of their structural arrangement. The software EVOC combines the frequency of evoked words with their sequential order, generating four possible groups, producing a table. The most frequent and promptly spoken words appear in the upper left quarter of the table. They form the nucleus of representations, that is, the words that define them, having a stable and consensual character (Abric, 1984, 1989). The most frequent but not promptly evoked words appear in the second quarter. Words that have a low frequency but are readily evoked appear in the third quarter, while those with a low frequency which are evoked less promptly appear in the fourth quarter of the table. These last three quarters are thought to contain the words forming the periphery of the representations.

A list of 25 words was found to represent the nucleus of the representations of teacher identity and work: 1) to help, 2) joy, 3) student, 4) love, 5) anguish, 6) learning, 7) attention, 8) competent, 9) friend, 10) comprehension, 11) commitment, 12) dedication, 13) dialogue, 14) discipline, 15) education, 16) educator, 17) to teach, 18) study, 19) patience, 20) profession, 21) respect, 22) responsibility, 23) wisdom, 24) classroom, and 25) vocation.

In the second phase of the project, associated researchers carried out specific subprojects linked to the main research, and were able to undertake a more in-depth analysis of the data obtained during the first phase. This article presents two sets of data obtained from the second phase of the CIERS-ed project, in which 270 students participated. First, it discusses the results of the responses of a small sample of students of pedagogy (random sample of six

males and four females) to the «formation of groups» task using the 25 words listed above. Secondly, it develops a comparative analysis of the responses of 76 students to the «directed word classification» task, also using these words. These students were 20 males enrolled in pedagogy, 18 males enrolled in teacher training degree programmes, 20 females enrolled in pedagogy, and 18 females enrolled in teacher training degree programmes. All subjects were middle-class students, aged between 24 and 35 years old. The vast majority attended evening courses at universities and worked during the day. As for the level of their parents' education, only 12% of pedagogy students and 19% of teacher degree programme students had parents with a higher degree, indicating that they were, in the main, the first generation in their families to attend university.

### ***The «formation of groups» task***

In this task, the sample of 10 undergraduates was invited to organise the 25 words according to any common associations. The words were written on individual cards and presented, shuffled, to the students. They had to define their own criteria for placing the words together in the same group and were free to form as many groups as they wanted. However, each word could be assigned to one group only. After forming the groups, subjects were asked to give a title to each of them and to justify their choices of association verbally. The experimenter took note of all the groups produced and the titles given for each one. The subjects' justifications were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The titles had the function of producing a synthesis of ideas and presented an opportunity to compose separate elements in a connected and coherent whole. The justifications, on the other hand, allowed subjects to reflect upon the titles and on the criteria used to form the groups of words. Analysis of the justifications would then permit access to their lines of reasoning, and identify not only shared representations about teaching, but also individual views about and expectations for this profession.

The data were classified in accordance with their thematic qualities, following the content analysis proposed by Bardin (1977). Four tables were produced showing the categories, their frequencies and examples of titles and justifications. Female subjects formed a total of 18 groups with the 25 words (see Table 1). The corresponding 18 titles were classified in six categories representing the most common themes: «Qualities of a teacher», «Context», «School actors», «Function», «Emotional dimension», and «Vocation».

TABLE 1  
**Classification of 18 titles (four female subjects)**

Categories	Examples of justifications	%
Qualities of a teacher	«commitment», «responsibility», «attitude»	38.88
Context	«classroom», «go beyond classroom»	16.66
School actors	«teachers», «students»	16.66
Function	«teach», «develop»	11.11
Emotional dimension	«feelings», «respect»	11.11
Vocation	«more than a profession»	5.55

The category «Qualities of a teacher» (38.88%) links titles such as «commitment», «responsibility», and «attitude». They probably indicate the main attributes of this profession for the subjects, such as being committed to the job, being responsible and having an appropriate, «educator» mindset. The next category, «Context» (16.66%), groups titles such as «classroom» and «go beyond classroom». They point to the locations where teaching takes place, and «going beyond classroom» may indicate a reference to the expansion of teaching work to other domains. The category «School actors» (16.66%) has titles such as «teacher» and «student» which name the main school agents and specify their roles. The titles «teach» and «develop» were assigned to the category «Function» (11.11%), since they make reference to the objectives of education. The titles «feelings» and «respect» were classified in the category «Emotional dimension» (11.11%) and may be pointing to the emotional experiences attached to the job of teaching, while the category «Vocation» (5.55%), with the title «more than a profession», may be referring to the missionary aspect of teaching and to the activity of caring, traditionally associated with this occupation.

TABLE 2  
**Classification of the 26 titles (six male subjects)**

Categories	Examples of justifications	%
School actors	«teachers», «students»	23.07
Actions	«to learn», «to change», «to form»	15.38
Social aspect	«social relations», «friendship», «together»	15.38
Plan	«to decide», «to organise», «to be objective»	15.38
Context	«school»	11.53
Emotion and aspiration	«love», «wish»	11.53
Qualities of a teacher	«vocation», «to be understanding»	7.69

Male subjects formed 26 groups of words, and the corresponding titles were classified in seven categories according to their most common themes: «School actors», «Actions», «Social aspect», «Plan», «Context», «Emotion and aspiration», and «Qualities of a teacher» (see Table 2).

The titles «teachers» and «students» in the category «School actors» (23.07%) probably indicate a preference for the identification of the main school agents and their specific roles. The category «Actions» (15.38%) links titles such as «to form», «to change», and «to learn». They may express what subjects think are the main purposes of teaching work. The category «Social aspect» (15.38%) brings together titles such as «social relations» and «friendship», which may emphasise the importance attached to the group, or the importance of social interactions among the people who constitute school communities. The category «Plan» (15.38%) may refer to the design and implementation of teaching activities and practices. The titles «to decide» and «to organise» were classified in this category. The category «Context» (11.53%) locates where teaching takes place, «school». The category «Emotion and aspiration» (11.53%) may indicate the necessary emotional disposition in teaching, with titles such as «love» and «wish», while the category «Qualities of a teacher» (7.69%), with the titles «vocation» and «to be understanding», may refer to a natural disposition to adopt this profession, including the ability to interact with others.

The content analysis revealed a number of meanings related to teacher identity and work and demonstrated that females presented a focused discourse about the topic, since almost 40% of their titles were related to a teacher's qualities and characteristics. On the other hand, male subjects presented a more even distribution of categories with the idea of the teacher's role, functions and activities in schools having a slight predominance. Therefore, although male and female subjects shared common beliefs about this profession, content analysis indicated the existence of different perspectives that in the female group articulate identity through the qualities of a professional, but do so in the male group through professional duties and activities. The number of categories identified corroborates Louro's research (1997a, 1997b) in relation to the coexistence of different teacher identities in both gender groups.

Another difference between male and female responses to this experiment may be found in the category «Qualities of a teacher». Titles such as «commitment», «responsibility» and «attitude», evoked frequently by female subjects, seem to be more descriptive and less stereotypical than the ideas expressed by the titles «vocation» and «to be understanding» produced by male subjects, which entail a strong feeling of fitness for a particular career and an emphasis on human interaction. Although traditionally teaching has been more closely associated with women's work and has attached to it a sense of looking after children and caring (Sousa & Bôas, 2011), this «common sense» knowledge did not seem to emerge in female choices of titles, since none of them contained references to caring. This may indicate a change in what has been considered a prominent characteristic of teachers. The analysis of male responses to

this task corroborates the views expressed by Izquierdo (1994) and Vianna (2002) in the sense that it showed the alignment of male subjects with conventional ideas of teaching.

Content analysis as proposed by Bardin (1977) was carried out in order to understand to a greater degree the textual data obtained from subjects' justifications. It employed units of meaning, expressed in sentences, to classify the justifications given to the groups of words and titles. Two tables were constructed which enabled visualisation of the categories, their frequencies and some examples of statements (see Tables 3 and 4). Each unit of meaning was counted only once for a specific category.

Among all the statements from female students, 16 units were identified as justifying their choices of groups of words and titles and, therefore, were used in this analysis (see Table 3). Eight units (50%) were classified in the category «Teaching and learning», indicating that it is a key element constituting this group's representations of teaching. In three cases (18.75%), subjects referred to the teacher's need to communicate with others, and therefore, they were classified in the category «Dialogue». In another three cases (18.75%), the idea of expectations about the future was mentioned and formed the category «Future prospects». Category 4, «Factors external to school» (6.25%), made reference to social problems and their impact on school life; the category «Difficulties» (6.25%) points to the challenges facing university students in relation to their choice of profession.

TABLE 3  
**Classification of 16 justifications (four female subjects)**

Categories	Examples of justifications	%
Teaching and learning	«Teachers' task is to teach»; «Teachers' competence and experience facilitate learning»	50
Dialogue	«Classroom based on dialogue»	18.75
Future prospects	«At university you may realise this is not the career you want to follow»	18.75
Factors external to schools	«Discipline problems are hard to explain. The roots are also in society»	6.25
Difficulties	«It is difficult to be a teacher, to become a teacher (...) even if it is your vocation, it is a big challenge»	6.25

Among all the statements from male students, 22 units were identified as justifying their choices of groups of words and titles (see Table 4). Among the 22 units, 11 were classified in the category «Dialogue» (50%), stating that the ability to communicate with others was considered a key element in teaching. In the category «Learning» (22.72%), teaching and learning were said to be the aim of education, while in the category «How teachers should be» (22.72%), the focus was on the role of teachers. Only one justification, classified in the category «Profession» (4.54%), mentioned teaching as a professional occupation.

TABLE 4  
**Classification of 23 justifications (six male subjects)**

Categories	Examples of justifications	%
Dialogue	«Respect and dialogue», «communications. Lots of communication in the classroom», «student needs interaction»	50
Learning	«Classroom as a location for learning», «each student learns in a different way. You have to pay attention to that»	22.72
How teachers should be	«Teachers should help...», «teachers should be competent»	22.72
Profession	«You have to consider teaching as a profession»	4.54

The content analysis of justifications revealed a smaller number of meanings related to teacher identity and work than the previous study and showed the relative importance of some representations to male and female subjects. The ability to communicate with students seems to be the main element in the representation of being a teacher for male subjects, while teaching and learning were thought by female subjects to be the most relevant elements of this professional activity. However, words such as «dedication», «love», and «mission», which have previously expressed idealised and traditional views of being a teacher, were absent in both groups. An emphasis on learning, on interaction and the absence of traditional representations of being a teacher from these justifications may suggest that a process of transformation of this representation is taking place. Academic experience may be the factor supporting this change, since topics related to teaching, learning, and interaction are normally debated in the context of university life. This influence may be affecting subjects' discourses on this topic. Therefore, if different types of connections between the words are being made and students are able to articulate both traditional and scientific ways of thinking about teaching, this may have impacted on how the profession was conceptualised by this group.

### **The «directed word classification» task**

In the second study, subjects were asked to form five groups with the same 25 words. They were written on individual cards and placed, shuffled, on a table. Initially subjects had to choose five words they considered very much related to a teacher's work (Group 1), and from the remaining 20, five that they thought were the least related to a teacher's work (Group 2). The next step was to select the five words that were somewhat related to a teacher's work (Group 3), and, finally, to choose another five, from the 10 remaining, that they thought were not very much related to this work (Group 4). The last five cards were classified

in a neutral category (Group 5). According to Abric (1984), this set of classifications makes it possible to compare the relative importance of some elements of representations to different groups or subgroups of subjects.

In this study, the words in Groups 1 and 3 were placed together and formed one single category, «Related to a teacher's work». The same happened with the words in Groups 2 and 4. They were joined together and formed the category «Little related to a teacher's work». The last category remained the same and was named «Neutral words». Analysis was carried out for the words «love», «anguish», «dedication», «commitment», «competent», and «profession» since they were the ones most frequently associated with teacher identity (see Tables 5 and 6).

TABLE 5  
Classification of words – frequency distribution (38 female subjects)

Categories						
Related to a teacher's work			Little related to a teacher's work		Neutral	
Words	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Love	24	63.15	7	18.42	7	18.42
Anguish	4	10.52	30	78.94	4	10.52
Dedication	24	63.15	7	18.42	7	18.42
Commitment	27	71.05	6	15.78	5	13.15
Competent	20	52.63	10	26.31	8	21.05
Profession	10	26.31	23	60.52	5	13.15

TABLE 6  
Classification of words – frequency distribution (38 male subjects)

Categories						
Related to a teacher's work			Little related to a teacher's work		Neutral	
Words	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
Love	18	47.36	16	42.10	4	10.52
Anguish	0	0	38	100	0	21.05
Dedication	27	71.05	3	7.89	8	21.05
Commitment	30	78.94	4	10.52	4	10.52
Competent	27	71.05	7	18.42	4	10.52
Profession	15	39.47	18	47.36	5	13.15

The comparative analysis carried out between the two subgroups, male and female subjects, for classifications of the words «love» and «anguish» showed significant differences. The word «love» was more frequently classified in category 1, «Related to a teacher's work», than in

category 2, «Little related to a teacher's work», for both groups of subjects. Nevertheless, the distributions of frequencies in the population for this word were significantly different for the subgroups ( $\chi^2 = 5.20 > 0.10$ ;  $df = 2$ ). More female subjects (63.15%) seemed to think that love was an important attribute of a teacher's work than male subjects (47.36%). The centrality of love to the representations of teacher identity and work for female subjects may indicate that their roots can also be found in a mental and emotional disposition, where affection is seen as an important element in teaching. Izquierdo (1994) observed that affection was understood as an important characteristic of teaching, and in this aspect, both sets of data are similar.

The word «anguish» was more frequently classified in category 2, «Little related to a teacher's work», by both subgroups of subjects. However, the distributions of frequencies were significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 8.94 > 0.5$ ;  $df = 2$ ). Although few female subjects associated anguish with this work (10.52%), and some (10.52%) classified anguish in the neutral category, all male subjects classified anguish in the category «Little related to a teacher's work». As Sousa and Bôas (2011) observed, affection and the feeling of anguish were contents of the representation of teachers' work and identity. In this sense, this result corroborates their findings. However, it was also possible to see that representations of being a teacher brought about contrasting feelings specifically in the female group, since love and anguish coexisted there with very different positive and negative connotations, respectively. This suggests that affection and the feeling of anguish, which probably emerge from not accomplishing what was planned, are regarded as somehow related to teacher identity and work. However, this conflicting association of meanings was less accentuated among male subjects. This result corroborates what Vianna (2002) discussed. According to her, the concept of what it is to be male and female affects gender relations and the involvement of men and women in professions regarded as typically female. For her, competence is seen in opposition to affection, which may explain the lesser presence of women in positions of leadership in schools, since affection is regarded as a female characteristic. It may also account for the greater prevalence of men in these posts, as they are thought to have «hard-headed» attitudes more compatible with competence as leaders. The results in the present study also point to this polarity, with male subjects rejecting interpersonal skills as important characteristics of teacher identity and work.

The comparative analysis carried out between the subgroups for classifications of the words «dedication», «commitment», «competent», and «profession» showed no significant differences. The word «dedication» was classified more often in category 1, «Related to a teacher's work», by both male and female subjects, with slight differences between them: males = 71.05%; females = 63.15%. The distributions of frequencies were not significantly different between the subgroups ( $\chi^2 = 1.84 < 0.20$ ;  $df = 2$ ). The word «commitment» was also classified more often in category 1, «Related to a teacher's work», by both male and female subjects.

Although more male subjects classified this word in this category (male = 78.94%; female = 71.05%), the distributions of frequencies were not significantly different for the subgroups ( $\chi^2 = 0.67 < 0.20$ ;  $df = 2$ ). A similar result was observed with the word «competent». Although more male subjects (71.05%) than female subjects (52.63%) classified this word in category 1, the distributions of frequencies were not different between male and female subjects ( $\chi^2 = 2.91 < 0.20$ ;  $df = 2$ ).

The centrality of dedication, commitment, and competence to the representation of teachers' work and identity for male and female students may indicate that their categorisation is based on the idea of efforts made for a specific purpose, implying a sense of responsibility within the task of teaching and its need for skills, talent, and qualification. Vianna (*ibidem*) showed that the male/female dichotomy has been broken in this profession and that male and female teachers alike have been assuming both inward-facing roles and leadership roles and have developed interpersonal and communicative competences. In this sense, the emphasis on «competence» by both groups may indicate a similar phenomenon.

The word «profession» received a different classification. Both male and female subjects classified it in category 2, «Little related to a teacher's work». Although more female (60.52%) than male (47.36%) subjects associated this word with this category, the distributions of frequencies were not significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 1.61 < 0.20$ ;  $df = 2$ ). This result also corroborates other research on this theme, showing the strong association of teaching with ideals of mission and vocation, making it a «calling», and distancing it from the concept of a profession (Silva, 2002; Sousa & Bôas, 2011; Gatti, 2011). Female subjects have scored even higher than male subjects in this classification. This may indicate that the representation of teaching finds references in other female activities outside the context of formal work.

Another analysis was carried out separating the results for each word by group, pedagogy students *versus* students enrolled in teaching degree programmes. The only significant differences were found among female subjects for the classifications of the words «love» and «commitment». The distributions of frequencies in the population for the word «love» were significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 6.28 > 0.05$ ;  $df = 2$ ). More female subjects in pedagogy (83.33%) seemed to think that love was an important attribute of teachers' work than female students in teacher training degree programmes (45%). The distributions of frequencies in the population for the word «commitment» were also significantly different ( $\chi^2 = 4.34 > 0.20$ ;  $df = 2$ ). More female students in pedagogy (77.77%) seemed to think that commitment was an important attribute of teachers' work than female students in teacher training degree programmes (65%). Since love and commitment are closely associated with caring and looking after children, this result indicates that emotional attachment and the feeling of engagement are more significant for students training to work with younger children.

## Discussion

The aim of this study was to reflect upon the representations of teacher identity and work, comparing the relative importance of some hegemonic views to different gender groups. One of its arguments was that hegemonic representations are being challenged by both male and female undergraduates. The theory of social representations provided a framework for understanding the coexistence of different representations.

Contrary to the general belief that scientific knowledge has more value than folk knowledge, Moscovici (2003) demonstrated that important decisions are, in fact, based on «common sense» knowledge which serves as guidance and justifications for people's actions. For him, representations are ways of classifying phenomena, since there is an attempt to ascribe new ideas and opinions to conventional categories. When something is named and classified in a category, and becomes associated with other objects of the same kind, all members of a community can talk about it. Ultimately, representations permit people to understand reality through their own systems of references, and in the process of doing so, bind people together, guide and orient their behaviour. As Abric (1989) demonstrated, apart from providing a means of anticipating actions and behaviours, representations facilitate the interpretation of situations and the production of justifications in relation to social norms.

Since stereotypes reflect «common sense» knowledge of «what being a teacher is all about», lending them a close resemblance to social representations, they could predispose future teachers to behave in accordance with widespread norms of conduct and could affect expectations of their future profession. However, Moscovici (2003) also pointed out that representations are being constantly constructed through dialogue and social interactions. Indeed, according to Jovchelovitch (2007), social representations constitute fields of knowledge that are in constant movement, showing that the focus of social psychology is on how different representations collide and compete in the social sphere, how they coexist in the same context, in the same social group or even in the same individual.

The results of these two studies show that although undergraduates shared historically determined representations of teacher identity and work, it was also possible to see that differences of representation which could be categorised by gender and type of training elucidated what was significant to specific groups of subjects in their understanding of the meaning of this profession. This result may indicate that some traditional representations are being challenged by all these groups of subjects. The effect of training cannot be dismissed either, since universities provide the context for discussion and debate on the theme of professional identity.

In Deschamps and Moliner (2008), we see a reflection upon identity formation as a dual process of finding similarities and differences between the individual and the group. The pre-

sent study indicated that, in the case of female subjects, changes in representations suggest a movement towards less stereotypical views about this occupation, which may indicate the effect of social context, academic experiences and individual history upon identity formation. There were also indications that traditional representations, though coexisting with more novel ones, remain prevalent. They assign individuals to a specific professional group because they correspond to stereotypical views about this occupation. The more novel views were expressed by the words «knowledge» and «learning», which, together with the conventional ideas of love and commitment, formed a complex group of meanings. However, this fluctuating set of meanings was less accentuated within male subjects, indicating a more unified view in this group.

These results constitute elements for debate in the context of teacher training, since they point to a shared common-sense understanding of the teacher's occupation. Identification of common-sense ideas about teacher identity and work can enlighten university teachers about the persistence of stereotypical concepts and how to challenge them so that active change in higher education settings can be promoted. Through an understanding of the roots of social representations and the processes of their evolution, one can achieve this task of change.

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