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THIAGO HENRIQUE MONTEIRO DE MACEDO

**“IT’S ONLY DO I STAY OR DO I QUIT?”: AN ANALYSIS OF A
TEACHER’S SPEECH DURING THE PANDEMIC**

RIO DE JANEIRO, OUTUBRO 2022

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ABSTRACT

This monograph explores a research talk with Roberta, a school teacher. It aims at understanding the teacher's emotions expressed in regarding the transition from in-site class to distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020 and 2021. As I analyze Roberta's speech, I also discuss teachers' accountability and emotions related to this transition in dialogue with studies about emotions in which discourse plays a relevant role and is approached through a sociocultural lens. This research provided room for the teacher to express herself and raised many questions about teachers' emotions.

KEYWORDS: Teacher emotions, Accountability, Distance Learning, Pandemic

RESUMO

Essa monografia explora uma conversa de pesquisa com uma professora de ensino fundamental 1. Tem por objetivo buscar entender as emoções da professora expressas na conversa relacionadas à transição do ensino presencial para o ensino a distância durante a pandemia de COVID-19 nos anos de 2020 e 2021. Enquanto analiso a fala da Roberta, discuto as responsabilidades dos professores e emoções acerca dessa transição em diálogo com estudos sobre emoções nos quais o discurso é parte central e é abordado de uma perspectiva sociocultural. Essa pesquisa ofereceu espaço para a professora se expressar e levantou questionamentos sobre as emoções dos professores.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Emoções de professores, Responsabilidade, Ensino a Distância, Pandemia

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Transcription conventions

...	Unmeasured pause
.	Descending or final intonation
?	Upward intonation
,	Continuity intonation
>word<	Speak faster
[Speech overlap starts
]	End of speech overlap
()	Speech not understood
(())	Analyst comment, description of non-verbal activity
↑	Intonation rise
↓	Intonation descent

Transcriptions conventions suggested by Bastos and Biar (2015) – conventions based on studies of Análise de Conversação (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson, 1974), symbols suggested by Schiffrin (1987) and Tannen (1989) apud SANTANA 2020

1. Introduction

A teachers' journey is not a linear one. From a beginning teacher to an experienced one, they all share a lot of stories of success, frustration, exhilaration and disappointment. There are many challenges to face and each teacher will face them differently, as they come from all different backgrounds, upbringing, education and experiences. However, some challenges seem to be common to a vast majority of teachers, such as salary issues, the performative agenda of the Brazilian educational system, lack of support from society, just to name a few.

Adding to this list, in 2020, a global pandemic started, changing the way we deal with virtually everything on a daily basis. People have suffered, businesses have closed, financial and social inequality skyrocketed, home-office has been established, social networking and technology have thrived and e-commerce has changed the way we shop. Education was not left out of the equation. How were schools and educators going to deal with a global pandemic? In a country as vast as Brazil, a variety of strategies were implemented. While some schools decided to post material online for students to study autonomously, and some had synchronous virtual classes, others had no internet available at all for educators and students alike, for example.

There was, then, a new challenge for schools and educators to meet. May it be called distance learning, online learning or remote learning, the fact is that the pandemic has affected the lives of many students, teachers, administrators and families/guardians. Questions were being asked about how to deal with this new way of doing things: Some teachers and students can deal with technology rather well, but this is not true for everybody. The lack of proper equipment and digital literacy may have presented a problem that is yet to be quantified. Additionally, how to adapt methodology, interaction and assessment to the online environment? To what extent are we going to change our materials? Which online tool can professionals use to teach the particularities of their subject? There are numerous possible answers to these questions. It is important to bear in mind that no single answer will provide a full understanding of the issues. With that in mind, I would like to state that

this paper takes into consideration my own feelings, anxieties and experiences and, for this reason, it is not my intention to generalize, but to reflect upon the experiences another English teacher and I have faced.

Before the pandemic, we were discussing recent trends in education and their demands. The advance of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math) methodology and flipped classroom methods, in which the student researches the subject or watches video lectures previously to attend the class, for example, were putting the students in charge of their own learning. It is not the purpose of this paper to argue whether these trends are positive or negative, but it is important to acknowledge that they existed and were being implemented. Each of these issues is lived in a particular way by each group. In my own context, for example, there was a demand from school administrators to implement said trends in the classroom setting. Demands which were met by various teachers at the schools I work.¹

However, the change to distance learning, henceforth DL, has altered classroom dynamics to a new extent. Once students were online, many teachers saw cameras and microphones shut and class participation dropped largely to zero. Classes shifted from being interactive to being teacher centered lectures with dozens of slides.

Teachers are generally reliant on students' feedback during class to understand and take necessary courses of action to maximize learning opportunities. When my colleagues and I saw cameras and microphones shut and even eye contact was removed from the classroom, we realized that there was no feedback. This means that we did not know what was happening to our students, leading to a significant rise in our anxiety levels. In an article published in Harvard Educational magazine, Avashia, a teacher who was interviewed for the article, clearly states what my peers and I were feeling. She says "I've never felt as unsuccessful as a teacher as I did during that initial March to June 2020. It was really an identity crisis as an educator," (CHRISTOPHER, 2022)

In addition to DL imposed due to the pandemic, Christopher Day and Gu Qing (DAY, 2009, p.15) have noticed that for the past few years

¹ You can learn more about these in the book 'Metodologias Ativas para uma Educação Inovadora: Uma Abordagem Teórico-Prática' by Lilian Bacich and José Moran.

there has been a growing demand for teachers to cater for students' well being, be it academic, social, and, or emotional. During the pandemic, what my peers and I have felt was that these needs skyrocketed.

Also, Day and Qing (2009, p.16) point out that many schools nowadays are hostile to teacher's emotions and well-being. They find little to no support from colleagues, administrators and families. Moreover, the pressure for achieving positive results at school and at university entry exams holds teachers back from what sometimes they know would be more appropriate in terms of learning. When pupils do not achieve said result, the teacher is usually the one held accountable. This has put teachers under constant pressure and it bears the questions: Who is attending to the teachers needs?

All in all, we may note that administrators in general pay little attention to teachers' well being. Understanding that this has been happening since before 2020 (CÔRTEZ, 2017) is key to inferring that the DL movement during 2020, and eventually 2021, just came about to highlight how little teachers' emotions and well-being was being taken into consideration.

As mentioned before, this paper takes into consideration my own feelings, experiences and anxieties towards everything that happened in 2020 and 2021. Actually, these very same anxieties, feelings and experiences were what led me to do this research. Upon constantly hearing from peers about their frustrations and anxieties during the first few months of the pandemic, I felt the same, and to add, we were not being heard by our superiors. My own desire to understand what we were feeling was the motivation for this research.

The objective of this paper is to try to reflect upon the emotions felt by a school teacher with many years of classroom experience, Roberta, throughout the year of 2020 and early 2021 and how it was expressed in her discourse. This research provided room for the teacher to express herself, her feelings and anxieties in a moment in which teachers were seemingly feeling unheard.

2 - Theoretical Framework

if I needed to get public transportation, I don't know, I keep thinking and I don't know how my body would react to that because that's scary, you know, and it's things that I don't think people that put pressure for these things to open, the school needs to open, the schools needs to open full day. I get it. It's really frustrating not to see your kid in school the whole day like it's supposed to be. But at the same time ... you don't know for sure if the teachers is taking the bus, taking the BRT, taking the subway. You don't know how, you know, the people that work in the school, clean the school, and... you're endangering these people in any way, you know.

(Roberta)

In this chapter I will describe the theoretical framework upon which this research is based. I will look at what Zembylas and other authors have said about emotions and the emotional labor of teaching and how that impacts teachers and how important is a body in the classroom, as hooks reminds us.

2.1 Emotions

Michalinos Zembylas is also an author I am taking into consideration for his studies in teachers' emotions. Zembylas contributed by stating that emotions are built through language and affect social life as a whole. His main argument is made in the fact that emotions are a discourse practice. In other words, when talking about emotion we should realize that they can be "seen as 'actions or ideological practices' serving specific purposes as part of the process of creating and negotiating reality" (Lutz, 1988, p. 10 *apud* ZEMBYLAS 2004. p. 108).

This is particularly important to highlight as we are going to see how a teacher interacts with her reality through emotions and what we identify as the underlying emotions in her speech. For example, what is a teacher calling attention to when she says that she does not want to be an administrator, emphasizing the 'not' word in her speech?

Yeah, I am, but it is frustrating, I think it's also frustrating the whole well, we need teachers like... ↑ I'm not an administrator, I don't want to be an administrator, I don't want that kind of pressure. I don't want that kind of choice ... but that whole situation where I feel like if I'm an administrator and my teachers have to go to work and they are with these kids the whole day. Anxiety levels are high and then it's oh, no, but you know, we are going to do ↑ yoga in one day, ↑ Zumba classes or this and that, I feel like, honestly, this is not this is not how you're going to help me. ((laughing)) This is not all, but it's a safe distance like great, but it's not the issue [It's not the issue, right]. Roberta: (00:28:10 - 00:28:57)

Furthermore, power relations are an important issue to be observed when it comes to living socially, and it should not be overlooked when it comes to teaching. As Zembylas (2005, p.937) mentions, emotions are the way through which we, “socially and culturally specific persons,” are “engaged in complex webs of power relations”.

The different power relations established in school settings have different impacts on teachers. The powers at play in job stability may affect the way we reflect upon our own practices. For one, administrators, with the power over our job stability, may hold teachers responsible for students not achieving the pedagogical demands, namely a passing mark, of a school. This may affect teachers negatively and have them second guessing their pedagogical choices in the classroom. “Is my test really that difficult? Should I make it easier? Am I explaining clearly to students?” are some of the questions teachers may ask themselves. By the same token, students’ families and guardians may pose a threat or provide support to. In my own experience, families usually pose more of a threat than provide support for the teacher. I have seen families with no educational background in second language acquisition discuss with the school my choices of how to teach the subject I specialized in. Bearing in mind that this has happened to myself and peers, what scares me the most is that school coordinators often listen to these families and actually interrogate us about our practices. This has a direct impact on our choices in the classroom as I have felt hostage to meeting up a family’s expectation of what my class should be and not my own expectations as a trained professional.

Also, the fact that teachers are under constant observation of peers, administrators, students and family alike exerts pressure on how we

behave and expose ourselves. In my personal experience, in order to avoid creating conflict, I have to be careful when dealing with students whose views on certain topics are sensitive to me. Regardless of the nature of the conflicts, whether it is an issue of political orientation or animal rights, conflicts may spark complaints, which, in turn, may eventually lead to teachers being fired.

Moreover, Zembylas suggests

that teacher emotions are psychologically and socially constructed in “social relationships and systems of values in their families, cultures, and school situations” which “profoundly influence how and when particular emotions are constructed, expressed, and communicated” (Zembylas 2003, p.216).

A teacher is not an unbiased person that exists just in the classroom. We are people with cultural and religious beliefs, job and life expectations and educational backgrounds that interact with the world around us based on what we are, have been through. In other words, our interaction with the world is grounded in our experience. This regards the choices we make while expressing our emotions through our speech, whether or not it is a conscious choice. Day and Qing (2009 p.18) highlight the importance of teacher emotions and well being in the classroom:

the emotional content of their (teachers) lives in schools and classrooms may have short and longer term consequences for how they feel about themselves and others and how they behave (i.e. their experiences of interactions with pupils, colleagues, parents and, more vicariously, policy agendas from within or without the school, may affect their self efficacy, sense of professional identity and, ultimately their commitment and effectiveness)

Then again, teachers, as any other person, are social beings, meaning that the interaction we have with the settings that surround us affect the way we are. These interactions and their emotional significance may lead a teacher to question their choices. A teacher has to deal with a plethora of issues on a daily basis, such as parents and administrators, interference in the classroom, policy agendas and governmental decisions that directly affect the school curriculum, being held responsible for things that are not their choice, not to mention dealing with students on a regular basis. If dealing with students is not easy, for a variety of reasons, dealing

with students during pandemic times when they are “having their lunch or having their breakfast in their PJs, literally playing with toys as I was talking.”, as Roberta mentions, might be even more difficult. It is undeniable how this influences a teachers’ life which leads many of us to question our choice of profession and for how long we can take it. Roberta summarizes this when she says

“So that's the most frustrating for me, is that ↑decisions are made, and I can, my decision power it's only do I stay or do I quit?” (Roberta (00:29:57 - 00:30:07). Roberta shows us how she feels frustrated, I would say, towards decisions made by others that affect her environment, in which the only decision she can make is whether to stay or to leave. In the same Harvard article mentioned in the introduction, we learn that “A 2021 RAND survey found that nearly a quarter of teachers thought about leaving their jobs at the end of that school year. In an industry where 75% of district leaders and principals report moderate to severe staffing shortages, according to a 2021 *Education Week* Research Center survey, that number is concerning.” (CHRISTOPHER, 2022)

The environment teachers are inserted in may deeply affect their relationship with the class. If a work environment is threatening to a teachers’ well being, they are more likely to fall short on their goals and expectations in class. When you take into consideration a pandemic environment when people are afraid to leave their own homes, being asked to go to work may pose a serious threat to one’s well-being. Roberta expresses this in the opening of this section.

C. Day and G. Qing (DAY, 2009 p.16) also emphasize the context in which education is currently inserted

more demands are being made (for) teachers to contribute to the academic, social, and emotional well being of pupils. Thus it is important that policy makers, teacher educators and school principals attend to teachers’ own sense of well-being.

Regarding academic issues, teachers are asked to provide more practice to tend to students’ needs, sometimes a particular student with a particular need, or, as it is very common in Brazil, to ensure students have a passing mark in the university entry exam - ENEM (Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio). When it comes to social issues, we, teachers, are being

asked more and more to get students to be more active in the communities they participate in, be it the school community, with group activity or students' council, or their neighborhood, with, for example, social projects. It is interesting to see that teachers have also been asked to contribute to students' emotional well being. This requires from the teacher a more and more tailor-made style of teaching. This becomes an issue when a teacher has to attend to each and every student's separate needs, translating to an overload of work.

School administrators and policy makers need to hear teachers more in order to provide serious support for teachers' well-being as work demands and pressure only increase exponentially (MACIEL, 2014). Here, we can see the echoes of such issues in Roberta's speech:

I feel like if I'm an administrator and my teachers have to go to work and they are with these kids the whole day. Anxiety levels are high and then it's oh, no, but you know, we are going to do ↑ yoga in one day, ↑Zumba classes or this and that, I feel like, honestly, this is not this is not how you're going to help me. ((laughing)) This is not all, but it's a safe distance like great, but it's not the issue [It's not the issue, right]. Roberta (00:28:27 - 00:28:57)

This point serves to illustrate how school administrators and policy makers are not paying enough attention to us teachers, whether purposefully or not. The idea that a yoga or a zumba class would suffice to decrease the levels of anxiety and stress during the first year of the pandemic is a superficial one. As Roberta tells us, the issue is much broader than this. It is, in my understanding, about power relations and how much the well-being of teachers is being taken into consideration. Once we are in a vulnerable position, being exposed to pressures from all sides, we need support.

Here, I understand 'well being' as

a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community. (DAY, 2009 p.16)

Well-being is pivotal to anyone's life. Under that light, how can a teacher develop their potential, work productively and creatively, and most

importantly build positive relationships if they are under constant pressure?

Emotions and well being are well aligned. How can we understand teachers' emotions expressed in the classroom? Ultimately, we are not looking to improve the quality of life or the well being of the teacher, but rather, to understand it (ALLWRIGHT, 2002).

There are two concepts we also need to look at. The idea of teacher vulnerability, which addresses teacher expertise and commitment, and also the way we understand emotions.

The idea of teacher vulnerability will be discussed through the theoretical lenses of Kelchtermans (2017, p.16)

Not being in control of essential working conditions (such as the students one finds in one's class or the colleagues one finds in one's school), not being able to actually prove one's effectiveness as a teacher (and yet having students' outcomes used as "evidence" to evaluate one's professional quality), and, most importantly, lacking an unquestionable basis for judgment (and therefore always finding one's judgments being exposed to possible criticism and contestation) are all inherent to the teaching job. Therefore the vulnerability they compose is to be seen as a structural characteristic of the job and not a personal characteristic of the individual...Professional vulnerability is therefore not a flaw, a weakness, but the inevitable outcome of the fact that enacting the teaching profession requires not only expertise (knowledge, skills, competencies) but also commitment (care, morals, and ethics) as a person.

Being a teacher means being in the forefront of an educational system that involves school administrators, teacher trainers, publishing companies, policy makers, other teachers, students, their guardians and more. However, in my experience and those around me, I have noticed that a teacher has actually very little to no decision-making power or control over this system. Actually, we are susceptible to unpredictable conditions and held accountable for many of its outcomes. We are constantly asked to study new methodologies, to improve our classes, to make them more dynamic, interactive and technological at the same time that we have to cater for each student's individual need, to meet governmental standards, to meet family's expectations, hand in and assess papers and work under unrealistic deadlines.

Under the pandemic scenario, teachers were asked to reinvent their way of teaching from a classroom setting to an online setting. Of course,

no one could have predicted what was going to happen, and teachers, much like anyone else, were thrown into quarantine for months.

Emotions, as described by Robert Solomon (2004, p. 83 apud BULLOUGH JR, 2009, p.36) are a complex of judgments towards something, that they have an object they are directed to and they have an intention.

“An emotion is a judgment which constitutes our world, our surreality, and its ‘intentional objects.’ An emotion is a basic judgment about ourselves and our place in our world, the project of values and ideals, structures and mythologies, according to which we live and through which we experience our lives”

Said judgments are not just a reaction to the world we interact with, but rather a way we have of engaging with it. The way we materialize our emotions varies from person to person, the context in which they are inserted, the practices we are engaged in at the moment. Nevertheless, we do understand that teachers are not often allowed to express their emotions in the workplace for the fear of being punished or dismissed.

2.2 The Body

DL has brought many changes to the classroom. Teachers had to find, revisit and redefine their methodologies and approaches as well as engineer new tech-based methodologies to deal with new challenges. In the teachers’ room I would visit or online meetings I participated in, often I would hear long lasting discussions about which is the best tool or app to use, how to prepare tests online, how to diminish the impact of cheating in tests, if schools were going to pay for new equipment or teacher would have to use their own personal funds for this. However, one thing I have always found surprising was the fact that no one mentioned that we were not in class anymore. In other words, the very space of the classroom was redefined. The room was removed from the class. What are the implications of this? I, for one, have always liked to move around the classroom, get closer to students to provide support, make sure, to the best of my abilities, that most students would have some of my attention,

to make eye contact and speak their names as often as I could. When you transport the physical setting to an online one, much of that is lost.

Eye contact was all but removed from the interaction as students would have their cameras shut. Calling students by their names would, more often than not, be met with silence, and even trying to provide the much-needed support was futile. Needless to say, walking around the room was, well, impossible.

The way I see it, this is as important as, or even more important, than discussing which webcam model is better. Being in class and interacting with students is part of our identity as teachers

“But as teachers I think our emphasis has, over the years, been to affirm who we are through the transaction of being with other people in the classroom and achieving something there. Not just relaying information or stating things, but working with people.” (hooks, 1994, p. 135)

The importance of the presence of a teacher in the classroom is brought to light in a very interesting conversation between bell hooks and Ron Scapp. They state that being in front of the class or behind a desk is what is usually expected from a teacher and that is the most common idea of ‘being in class’ (hooks, 1994, p.137). However, when a teacher moves around the class, you bring yourself to the students, establishing “a certain kind of face-to-face relationship and respect for “what I say” and “what you say.” (...) As people move around it becomes more evident that we work in the classroom.” (hooks, 1994, p.138). As we are going to see in Roberta’s talk, what happens when we remove the body from the classroom? The first thing she mentions is students' attire, as they start to attend classes in their PJs. But what about the teachers? What happens when you remove their presence from the classroom? Do teachers feel as if they lose control? In the end, what kind of control do we actually have?

3. METHODOLOGY

In this section we are going to discuss how I have conducted this research.

First it is important to establish where the idea of the research came from. In my 18 years of experience as a teacher, many were the times in which I heard peers complaining about the profession and their working conditions. I have complained many times myself. There are many things which we, teachers, complain about. In Brazil, salary is a common issue as many teachers believe they are underpaid if they take into consideration the amount of work they do. Additionally, there is a general feeling of lack of support from administrators and an excessive pressure of families and guardians in the educational environment. Also, I have heard teachers complaining about the lack of resources. The growing demands of a performative agenda, focused on standardized testing and university entry exams, add to the pressure at work. In the end, teachers are often held accountable for pupils' performance. On top of that, the changes upon education inflicted by the COVID-19 quarantine protocols only came to add to the list of complaints. Moving to an online environment, teaching from home, and the lack of student response were all heard in teacher's meetings I took part in.

Considering the Applied Linguistics perspective that research is focused in the context where people act, behave and live (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p. 21 apud CÔRTEZ, 2017 p.22), and in order to better understand what teachers were going through, I decided to talk to two of them. The choice of hearing the voice of teachers is one I made very early when thinking about this paper, since my peers and I are the ones inserted in the classroom. One of the ideas was to provide a safe space for us teachers to share our feelings and thoughts. We do not always have such opportunities in our workspace. We can understand the context we are in and how it affects our lives.

In Côrtes (2017, p.26-27) we understand that

teachers are also the authors of photographs that show part of their many facets: they feel sad or happy; they get or do not get satisfied with having to comply with some order at work,

because this order goes against their ideological principles as professionals, (...) they suffer, and suffering can make them feel lost, alone, discouraged, discredited and skeptical about (some or all the) aspects of their professional practice.²

Teachers are among the ones, such as students and administrators, for example, that should be listened to if we are to understand what is going on in the classroom. In our daily practice, teachers are faced with a number of decisions and responsibilities that bring to the surface a variety of feelings. It is not always comfortable or pleasant to talk about one's feelings in the workplace and for this reason providing room for teachers to express their feelings outside the workplace seemed like a good opportunity to listen to them.

My initial thought was to organize a group meeting in which participants would talk and share their ideas and feelings altogether. However, that plan was not successful due to the participants' schedules and we could not arrange a time and day that all were available. Therefore I arranged an individual meeting with two teachers. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, I met online with Roberta using the Zoom app, on March 21st, 2021 and with another teacher on April 13th. However, due to time and work constraints, I decided to focus on the first participant.

It is important to highlight that the selection of the participant was done based on the relationship I had with them. Although my motivation to research teachers' emotions arose from one of the schools I work at, I did not find room to research there. The reason is as in that school I am not only a teacher, but also a coordinator, the participants might have felt somewhat afraid to share their thoughts as we worked together and I have a higher position in the school hierarchy. In addition, I would not feel comfortable asking them to participate due to my position and I was also unsure of how the school administrators would take this research happening on school premises.

Roberta is an acquaintance of mine and a personal friend of my wife Gabriela, so reaching her was uncomplicated. We exchanged messages on a mobile app, namely Whatsapp, and organized a meeting

² os professores também são os autores dos retratos que mostram parte de suas muitas facetas: sentem-se tristes ou felizes; ficam satisfeitos ou não de ter que cumprir alguma ordem no trabalho, por esta ir contra seus princípios ideológicos enquanto profissionais, (...) eles sofrem, e o sofrimento pode fazer com que se sintam perdidos, sozinhos, desestimulados, desacreditados, desencorajados e descrentes em relação a (todos ou a alguns) aspectos de sua prática profissional. (CÔRTEZ, 2017, p.26-27) translation made by the author.

for March 21st, 2021. The meeting was about 32 minutes long. The school that Roberta works in is a place in which I have little to no influence. The only connection I have with said school is that my wife, Gabriela, also works there, and her help to reach the participant was significant.

I was clear to tell Roberta that her identity would be omitted should she desire to and her name could be changed as well. Here's an account of the e-mails Roberta and I exchanged in which she describes herself, her experience and the place she works at.

Thiago Macedo ter., 14 de jun. 17:54 ☆ ↶ ⋮
 para [REDACTED]
 Dear Roberta,
 I hope this email finds you well.
 I am writing to ask you a favour regarding the Monograph paper I am currently working on.
 I'd like to know if you could write a text introducing yourself to the paper. Feel free to write as little or as much as you want. The idea is to think about how you would like to be presented to the people that are going to read the paper.
 In addition, is there any pseudonym or identification you would like to be called or used when talking about you? I am asking this because of privacy issues.
 Once again, thanks for your tremendous help with the paper.
 Best regards,
 Thiago Macedo

Image 1: MACEDO, Thiago. Introduction letter for the monograph paper, 14 junho 2022

Roberta [REDACTED] sex., 29 de jul. 22:24 ☆ ↶ ⋮
 para mim [REDACTED]
 My name is Roberta [REDACTED]. I am currently working as a homeroom teacher at [REDACTED]. I have also worked as an English teacher in other schools and courses. I teach 4th grade at the moment but I have worked as a 1st grade teacher for most of my professional life. Taking part in the children's literacy process is my passion.
 ...

Image 2: MACEDO, Thiago. Introduction letter for the monograph paper, 14 junho 2022

Thiago Macedo [REDACTED] seg., 1 de ago. 18:52 ☆ ↶ ⋮
 para Roberta [REDACTED]
 Dear Roberta,
 Thank you again for your contribution. I must ask, for safety issues, if there is any identification that you would like to be mentioned as. I can use your name, omit parts of your name or use an entirely different name if you wish.
 Also, since the conversation, and as it has taken so long for me to write, has your situation at the school changed? If so, do you allow me to include any new information in the paper?
 Then again, thank you very much!
 Best regards
 Thiago Macedo

Image 3: MACEDO, Thiago. Introduction letter for the monograph paper, 14 junho 2022

Roberta [REDACTED]
para mim

3 de ago. de 2022 14:42 ☆ ↶ ☰

Dear Thiago,

I do not mind you using my name / last name.

Since that conversation I have quit my job to focus on my studies. I am currently working from home as a translator and English teacher (online). You can include this information in the paper if you wish.

Kind regards

...

Image 4: MACEDO, Thiago. Introduction letter for the monograph paper, 14 junho 2022

The talk was based on Araújo (2014, p.57) and her description of *research talk*. She mentions that, during her Master's thesis, the semi-structured interview she had planned turned into something that resembled a conversation. Interactions between the participants seemed less controlled by the researcher and there was a balance between interviewer and interviewees taking turns in the conversation.

Although I initially had a question to start off the conversation, all the other interactions were as natural as possible and were closer to a talk than to an interview. I let the participant drive the talk and asked questions based on what she was saying. This led to some very interesting points of view, feelings and perspectives, which will be looked upon in the Analysis section and Understandings section of this paper. I cannot disregard my perspectives, feelings and anxieties in the process. This research talk is as much of a space for Roberta to talk as it is to myself. I am part of the process as much as she is.

4. ANALYSIS

This talk took place on March 21th, 2021, online, via the Zoom application.

Roberta [00:02:58 - 00:03:09]	I feel like that in the beginning it was hard, but parents would understand more because I feel like everyone was under the impression that this is ↑going to go away soon.
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Roberta says that DL was hard, but initially families were understanding as both teachers and families believed it was a temporary situation. Interesting to see the use of a positive word towards parents' attitudes. Roberta mentions the struggle to adapt her lessons to an online platform and post "lessons that were parent-friendly and student-friendly lessons that were still helping students' development". Parent's attitude towards DL would later change as the pandemic and quarantine were showing no signs of ending. This would eventually exert more pressure on her.

Roberta: [00:04:32 - 00:04:47]	So yeah, and and then being there for thinking of those online classes, because we have those synchronous times that just like we are doing now, they had to be and we have to teach. ↑How do I do this? You know, that was a little hard in the beginning.
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The fact that Roberta raises her voice and that it shakes when talking about the online synchronous question "How do I do this?" makes

us wonder about her insecurity towards this new procedure. What was she uncertain about? The new way of teaching? The use of new technology in class or to teach? The impact this would have on her and her students? The goals that she establishes as a teacher? Moreover, Roberta uses the idea of obligation twice in a row. This seems to show us some of the pressure that she is feeling as she is putting on herself the responsibility and accountability of the work. Besides, she, apparently, minimizes the challenge of the situation by using 'a little' alongside the adjective 'hard'. She might have, even if unaware, tried to quantify the challenges she was facing.

Later she mentions she has been teaching 1st graders for the past 8 years, however, she is not trained for DL. Under pressure and facing any new situation, we must understand that we are all, somewhat, inexperienced. She finishes this though by saying:

Roberta: [00:05:17 - 00:05:28]	So I feel like the beginning was more: what do ↑I do? Like, I don't know how to do any of these things and then, oh, now ↑I know. But now parents are super frustrated and they just want to just want to go back.
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This leads us to think she is talking about the use of new technology in the classroom in tandem with the new procedures. The emphasis on 'I' can be seen or read as her sense of accountability. Roberta is indicating part of her will to learn even under harsh conditions.

Throughout the talk we learn that Roberta, up to a certain extent, came to terms with her own accountability, but, at the same time, families, guardians and administrators started to show signs of dissatisfaction. In a way, it looks as if what she did was never enough. Teachers are often held accountable for more things than they have the opportunity to choose. Meyer (2009 pg.74) writes that "during student teaching these prospective teachers are not afforded as many choices as they are held responsible,

which evokes a myriad of tensions.” Although Meyer is talking about teachers in training, the same can be said about all teachers. Demands from schools are often higher than what they offer the teachers in terms of choice.

Once the problem is solved “now I know”, Roberta focuses her attention on parents, highlighting that they are frustrated with everything that was going on. As mentioned before, families and guardians were understanding until the situation did not suit them anymore. Now, parents wanted children to go back to school for a number of reasons that are too many to list here, but this again exerts a certain amount of pressure on school and teachers alike. How to deal with students returning to school? How to ensure the safety protocols are being followed?

Further on, Roberta says

Roberta: [00:07:06 - 00:07:46]	I yeah, I don't I don't I still don't like it, because even back now, I know that's not a question, but even now, things are not back to normal. So I, I, I, I'm having to do the whole old school ↑let me explain this. Instead of, you know, how we used to do things before with lots of group work, pair work. Can you guys figure it out and tell me now? It's because we need to be aware of everyone in their place and not being together. I still have to be very much like I'm right here. Yeah, I have to teach. I actually teach some topics. That's hard for me right now. Still is. ↓I don't like it.
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Here we can see an example of a shift in methodology during DL which Roberta illustrates by saying “*the whole old school: ‘do the whole*

old school ↑*let me explain this.*” and compares it to “*how we used to do things before with lots of group work, pair work. Can you guys figure it out and tell me now?*”. This change puts the teacher under a level of stress as the ideas of accountability and expectations come back into play. The changes and shifts in the classroom were not made by Roberta, however, she is still the one responsible for the students’ learning process, in her own words, “*I have to teach. I actually teach some topics*”.

The way Roberta has been working for the past 8 years does not suit this new paradigm. She is the one responsible for the students’ learning process, however, she has to deal with a drastic change in her classroom. What calls more attention in this shift is what she says in the end. “*That’s hard for me right now. Still is. ↓I don’t like it.*” Roberta was very straightforward in her negative feelings towards this shift. She repeatedly uses the word ‘*hard*’ throughout the conversation to qualify her whole experience with DL.

This movement of going, in her own words, “*old school*” seems, for her, uncomfortable. Her idea of a class is one in which students interact with each other and work out the situations proposed, students play a central role in class. In DL, students are no longer interacting with each other as they used to, and Roberta resorted to the “*old school*” way of teaching and began “*explaining*” to students.

When comparing the beginning of DL and later that year when some students were going to school, Roberta describes her frustration with students’ progress:

Roberta [00:11:08 - 00:11:40]	But but then as time went by and I can see, I've been in first grade for, it's my eighth year in in where I work right now and, I see the difference. I do, and I talked to the other teachers and we see that, yeah, they are behind... I don't like that word. But in comparison to
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	other years, they are >in in in< they were at home a lot of the time.
Roberta [00:12:30 - 00:12:46]	But what I struggled with at one point was ... not in the beginning, but as the virus was progressing and we're staying home, like ↑Oh, man. These kids, they they really are behind like some of them still. They don't know the short vowels now.

The idea of 'behind' may raise a lot of questions. Are they behind schedule? Are they not learning what they "should"? I use the word 'should' very loosely here as I understand that the learning process at schools is dictated by a curriculum that tries to homogenize the students and usually does not take into consideration students' individualities, let alone a change from on-site learning to DL. Roberta is expressing concern as she seems to be comparing what she, and the school system, expected students to be able to do in a particular moment during the schedule to what students are actually showing her that they are able to do, hence "*They don't know the short vowels now.*"

She then adds, when asked about her feelings:

Roberta: [00:12:52 - 00:13:47]	Yeah, Yes. Because, you know, parents complain and we complain in school. Everybody complains and ... but there's only so much you can do online. And and I think it was important to set some boundaries as well. And I did, even though, for example, I worked way more than my hours. But you know what that is like? You're a teacher.
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	<p>That was always true. But during the pandemic, I feel like the work even more. But for example, after four o'clock, I don't answer parent e-mail. I just don't. I'm not doing it unless I see that it's an urgent thing that they need to have an answer today, because tomorrow morning is already ... unless is that, I can even see the email, but I'm not going to, I'm going to reply or I will schedule it so that the >the the the< reply can go only in the morning.</p>
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I believe Roberta repeated the idea of 'complaining' coming from different sources to establish how much pressure the education system was under. In addition, she mentions the fact she had been working extra hours. Working conditions are a main source of conflict between teachers and administrators, and it is a defining factor when choosing to remain on the job. Teaching is a job that demands a lot from its practitioners, and the emotional toll it takes is considerable. As Schutz and Zembylas (SCHUTZ, 2009, p.3) point out:

“teaching is an occupation that involves considerable emotional labor. Emotional labor involves the effort, planning, and control teachers need to express organizationally desired emotions during interpersonal transactions. As such, emotional labor has been associated with job dissatisfaction, health symptoms and emotional exhaustion, which are key components of burnout and related to teachers who drop out of the profession.”

As Kelchtermans (2017, p.16) mentions “*Not being in control of essential working conditions*” is one of the defining ideas of why a teacher feels vulnerable at work. This is going to be brought up by Roberta later again in the conversation. She mentions that she had to ‘set some boundaries’ to work only a certain number of hours after school. It makes us wonder and ask ourselves how many teachers could have afforded

that? When accountability comes into play, and parents and administrators are pressuring teachers, how many teachers started to work extra hours?

<p>Roberta: [00:14:50 - 00:15:39]</p>	<p>I think I work in a school ... and with families ... that, luckily and fortunately, have means ... and ways that they can yeah, they do these kids, they they have money, they they have iPads and computers and materials. If we said we're going to use this kind of paper, that kind of paper, we're going to do an arts thing, these moms will order it. They will buy it. So it's not ... it's not like ... I seen so many places, you know, that would make me very frustrated if I couldn't even ... talk to my students or if I knew that there's some students that didn't have Internet and they couldn't even watch the lessons, you know.</p>
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Here we can see Roberta comparing her experience to that of other teachers she knows. In her point of view, the fact that the students she works with have, to some extent, access to resources (i.e. paper and internet) that others do not was an element that contributed to, as she calls it later, students' progress. She does mention that not having access to resources would have been an issue, and this makes us wonder how many teachers around Brazil felt that way.

The use of 'hard' comes to light again when Roberta starts talking about the beginning of a new school year, with a new class.

Roberta: [00:16:23 - 00:16:56]	That was hard. That was harder because that was. Yeah. So in the beginning, March, I already knew the kids. I already knew the parents, I already knew where they were. And we kind of worked from there. In August. ↑I didn't know the parents. I didn't know the kids. I had no clue. And we were all at home. And these parents were already frustrated and they just wanted the school to open. So, yeah, that was much harder. August was much harder than March, starting a new school year.
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In the beginning of the talk, Roberta used '*a little hard*' to describe her experience. Here we can see Roberta using '*much harder*' to describe the beginning of a new school term as it presented new students, new families and new challenges. The situation was already challenging, and as the year progressed it only got worse.

When talking about DL and cameras, Roberta comments that she had to make a deal with her students, and she soon realized that some students were not paying attention to class. She made a conscious decision of not worrying about it. However, she then again uses the word 'hard' to describe aspects of classroom organization.

Roberta: [00:20:45 - 00:21:12]	It was harder, yeah, it was harder to organize these kinds of like ... groups >we had groups< as well so that I could specify some things and they could have time to read to me to answer some questions and to talk. But we didn't, we really
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	<p>didn't have time to have all of the groups every day. You know, so yeah, that that was the thing.</p>
<p>Roberta: [00:21:31 - 00:22:09]</p>	<p>it is easier for me if it's literally out of my control, like I'm not in your house. So there's there's only so much I can do. It's harder for me when it is ... when I can do something about it and it's not working. That's what's frustrating for me the most. If we're here and you're here with me and I still can't have your attention ... That's more frustrating for me. But on these lessons, you know, if your child is literally in their PJs eating their breakfast [What can I do, right?]</p>

I can see Roberta expressing her frustrations if the students are at school and she cannot “have your attention” but the moment they went online and this was ‘*out of my control*’ as in “*I’m not in your house.*”, she leaves it as it is. How much control can be accounted for in the classroom setting? Is the attention span or interest of students somewhat related to the presence of a teacher in class? Do students only work under surveillance? I do not have the proper answers to such questions, but when I draw from my own experience, and as shown by Roberta’s, the physical presence of a teacher plays a significant role in students’ interaction and attention in class. When we are in class, we establish relationships that during DL were insufficient. I am not saying that the screen is the only reason that students are struggling with their learning process in 2020-2021, but putting the teacher away from students has had some substantial impact.

One of the most interesting moments of the talk happened when discussing this idea of classroom management, Roberta says

Roberta: [00:22:13 - 00:22:26]	No, I can't I can't I can't be too bothered about this. Yeah. I can't control. That's like can't control. Well, it must be growing. ((laughing)) I must be evolving.
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Upon realizing that she cannot control everything in her class Roberta says, with a smile on her face, that she must be evolving. The feeling of relief can be seen here. After so much struggle and second-guessing her own decisions and work, Roberta seemed to be overcoming her own issues.

Roberta [00:28:27 - 00:28:57]	like... I'm not an administrator, I don't want to be an administrator, I don't want that kind of pressure. I don't want that kind of choice. ... but that whole situation where. I feel like if I'm an administrator and my teachers have to go to work and they are with these kids the whole day. Anxiety levels are high and then it's oh, no, but you know, we are going to do ↑ yoga in one day, ↑Zumba classes or this and that, I feel like, honestly, this is not this is not how you're going to help me. ((laughing)) This is not all, but it's a safe distance like great, but it's not the issue [It's not the issue, right].
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Roberta shows a high level of dissatisfaction with how the administrators are dealing with the pandemic and teachers. Needless to

say that school administrators are also under pressure from families and guardians and as we have seen Day and Qing (2009, p.15) mentioned, it is pivotal that school administrators look to teachers' well being. However, according to Roberta, the idea that a yoga or a zumba class will help seems inadequate.

Roberta does not clearly express what the issue is, but the idea that working conditions exerts a lot of pressure on teachers is again brought to light. Following that, she mentions the fact that some people have to get public transportation and she is 'lucky enough to have a car' but if she didn't "*I keep thinking and I don't know how my body would react to that because that's scary.*" This sort of pressure directly affects teachers' mental health, which affects their motivation and work.

As Day and Qing (2009, p.18) mention:

the emotional content of their (teachers) lives in schools and classrooms may have short and longer term consequences for how they feel about themselves and others and how they behave (i.e. their experiences of interactions with pupils, colleagues, parents and, more vicariously, policy agendas from within or without the school, may affect their self efficacy, sense of professional identity and, ultimately their commitment and effectiveness)

Roberta [00:29:57 - 00:30:19]	So that's the most frustrating for me, is that ↑decisions are made, and I can, my decision power it's only do I stay or do I quit? ((laughing)) [Aham] You know, do I? And I'm staying for now. But I do. I am... anxiety levels ().
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We can see how vulnerable Roberta feels taking into consideration that the only decision she can afford is whether to stay or quit, and that due to her current financial situation she decides to stay.

Roberta [00:31:00 - 00:31:19]	So... but because that's not an option for me right now, because I
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	<p>have ↑bills to pay. We power through ... [yeah] but I did consider it, I considered it, and I'm not leaving my home for anything ↓besides working or buying food, you know.</p>
<p>Roberta [00:31:50 - 00:32:01]</p>	<p>I'm researching and I'm thinking of different courses and things that I can do because I never want to be in the situation again, that I am obligated to leave my house when I don't feel safe, you know.</p>

We can see that Roberta felt somewhat accountable to what was going on in class. Even when she expressed the idea of 'I'm doing what I can', the shift in classroom dynamics, the disruption of working conditions, the lack of power in decision making, accountability, the performative agenda, and vulnerability felt by Roberta has had, to some extent, affected her decision to continue to work as a teacher. We must also take into consideration her personal growth, as she herself has emphasized. The talk might have worked as a trigger to the teacher and myself to help us realize our own situations and has deepened our reflections about our quality of life (ALLWRIGHT, 2002). Her dedication, will to learn and enthusiasm for teaching might have been put in jeopardy under the stressful conditions in 2020 and 2021.

5. UNDERSTANDINGS

Distance learning has changed the way education was organized and managed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Teachers, school administrators, families and students were affected in ways that could have not been foreseen. We are still trying to fathom what happened and its effects.

Teaching is in and on itself a social practice and what happens to its participants when you change it drastically? The purpose of this paper was to provide a safe place and to hear Roberta's voice while expressing her feelings during this time of change.

We understand that emotions are expressed through language and it affects our social life. It is the way we engage in our power relations, the way we manifest ourselves into the various contexts we are inserted into. We, teachers, are not often allowed to express our emotions in the workplace, mostly for the fear of being punished, which may lead to a lot of self-doubting and frustration. Why is it that Roberta uses the word 'hard' so often to describe her experience during DL? Is it only my impression that no matter what she does, it never seems to be enough or does she feel the same? Do the families and the school administrators think the same? The emotional toll of being a teacher grew exponentially during DL.

For how long will Roberta and many other teachers, such as myself, be held accountable for decisions that we were not asked about and have no control over? That is more than enough pressure being exerted on Roberta, that ultimately, she can only think of *"So that's the most frustrating for me, is that ↑decisions are made, and I can, my decision power it's only do I stay or do I quit?"* In the emails exchange, we learn that she is not working at the school anymore, she is now, in 2022, teaching online. To what extent have working conditions and emotional labor affected her decision?

In the Brazilian school system, dictated by an content-based agenda, and under DL, to what extent can a teacher be held responsible for students being "behind"? The expectations of the families, administrators and teachers in tandem to the system and the national

curriculum may have bigger impacts on students than we can perceive today.

Regarding the school itself, changing the space from a classroom to an online app in which students felt comfortable to attend classes in their PJs while having breakfast makes us reflect upon the classroom setting. How important is it for students to see the teacher and feel her presence? To establish eye contact? To be under (constant) surveillance?

I wholeheartedly do not have the answers to these questions. I can only hope and expect that the opportunity to hear Roberta's voice and the reflections made on it will lend itself as inspiration to me, other teachers and researchers to help further understand what goes on in the classroom.

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7. APPENDIX

Roberta: [00:04:32 - 00:04:47]	So yeah, and and then being there for thinking of those online classes, because we have those synchronous times that just like we are doing now, they had to be and we have to teach. ↑How do I do this? You know, that was a little hard in the beginning.
Roberta [00:02:58 - 00:03:09]	I feel like that in the beginning it was hard, but parents would understand more because I feel like everyone was under the impression that this is ↑going to go away soon
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	<p>guys figure it out and tell me now? It's because we need to be aware of everyone in their place and not being together. I still have to be very much like I'm right here. Yeah, I have to teach. I actually teach some topics. That's hard for me right now. Still is. ↓I don't like it.</p>
Roberta [00:11:08 - 00:11:40]	<p>But but then as time went by and I can see, I've been in first grade for, it's my eighth year in in where I work right now and, I see the difference. I do, and I talked to the other teachers and we see that, yeah, they are behind... I don't like that word. But in comparison to other years, they are >in in in< they were at home a lot of the time</p>
Roberta [00:12:30 - 00:12:46]	<p>But what I struggled with at one point was ... not in the beginning, but as the virus was progressing and we're staying home, like ↑Oh, man. These kids, they they really are behind like some of them still. They don't know the short vowels now.</p>
Roberta: [00:12:52 - 00:13:47]	<p>Yeah, Yes. Because, you know, parents complain and we complain in school. Everybody complains and ... but there's only so much you can do online. And and I think it was important to set some</p>

	<p>boundaries as well. And I did, even though, for example, I worked way more than my hours. But you know what that is like? You're a teacher. That was always true. But during the pandemic, I feel like the work even more. But for example, after four o'clock, I don't answer parent e-mail. I just don't. I'm not doing it unless I see that it's an urgent thing that they need to have an answer today, because tomorrow morning is already ... unless is that, I can even see the email, but I'm not going to, I'm going to reply or I will schedule it so that the >the the the< reply can go only in the morning.</p>
Roberta: [00:14:50 - 00:15:39]	<p>I think I work in a school ... and with families ... that, luckily and fortunately, have means ... and ways that they can yeah, they do these kids, they they have money, they they have iPads and computers and materials. If we said we're going to use this kind of paper, that kind of paper, we're going to do an arts thing, these moms will order it. They will buy it. So it's not ... it's not like ... I seen so many places, you know, that would make me very frustrated if I couldn't even ... talk to my students or if I knew that there's</p>

	<p>some students that didn't have Internet and they couldn't even watch the lessons, you know</p>
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<p>Roberta: [00:20:45 - 00:21:12]</p>	<p>It was harder, yeah, it was harder to organize these kinds of like ... groups >we had groups< as well so that I could specify some things and they could have time to read to me to answer some questions and to talk. But we didn't, we really didn't have time to have all of the groups every day. You know, so yeah, that that was the thing.</p>
<p>Roberta: [00:21:31 - 00:22:09]</p>	<p>it is easier for me if it's literally out of my control, like I'm not in your house. So there's there's only so much I can do. It's harder for me</p>

	<p>when it is ... when I can do something about it and it's not working. That's what's frustrating for me the most. If we're here and you're here with me and I still can't have your attention ... That's more frustrating for me. But on these lessons, you know, if your child is literally in their PJs eating their breakfast [What can I do, right?]</p>
<p>Roberta: [00:22:13 - 00:22:26]</p>	<p>No, I can't I can't I can't be too bothered about this. Yeah. I can't control. That's like can't control. Well, it must be growing. ((laughing)) I must be evolving.</p>
<p>Roberta: [00:28:10 - 00:28:27]</p>	<p>Yeah, I am, but it is frustrating, I think it's also frustrating the whole well, we need teachers like...</p>
<p>Roberta [00:28:27 - 00:28:57]</p>	<p>like... I'm not an administrator, I don't want to be an administrator, I don't want that kind of pressure. I don't want that kind of choice. ... but that whole situation where. I feel like if I'm an administrator and my teachers have to go to work and they are with these kids the whole day. Anxiety levels are high and then it's oh, no, but you know, we are going to do ↑ yoga in one day, ↑Zumba classes or this and that, I feel like, honestly, this is not this is not how you're going to help</p>

	<p>me. ((laughing)) This is not all, but it's a safe distance like great, but it's not the issue [It's not the issue, right].</p>
<p>Roberta [00:29:08 - 00:29:54]</p>	<p>if I needed to get public transportation, I don't know, I keep thinking and I don't know how my body would react to that because that's scary, you know, and it's things that I don't think people that put pressure for these things to open, the school needs to open, the schools needs to open full day. I get it. It's really frustrating not to see your kid in school the whole day like it's supposed to be. But at the same time ... you don't know for sure if the teachers is taking the bus, taking the BRT, taking the subway. You don't know how, you know, the people that work in the school, clean the school, and... you're endangering these people in any way, you know</p>
<p>Roberta [00:29:57 - 00:30:19]</p>	<p>So that's the most frustrating for me, is that ↑decisions are made, and I can, my decision power it's only do I stay or do I quit? ((laughing)) [Aham] You know, do I? And I'm staying for now. But I do. I am... anxiety levels ().</p>

Roberta [00:31:00 - 00:31:19]	So... but because that's not an option for me right now, because I have ↑bills to pay. We power through ... [yeah] but I did consider it, I considered it, and I'm not leaving my home for anything ↓besides working or buying food, you know.
Roberta [00:31:50 - 00:32:01]	I'm researching and I'm thinking of different courses and things that I can do because I never want to be in the situation again, that I am obligated to leave my house when I don't feel safe, you know.