

**MENTAL HEALTH, TEACHER EDUCATION, AND TEACHING WORK IN  
CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: PSYCHOSOCIAL CHALLENGES, PROFESSIONAL  
IDENTITIES, INCLUSION, TECHNOLOGIES, EDUCATIONAL POLICIES, AND  
PERSPECTIVES ON THE CARE AND APPRECIATION OF EDUCATORS**

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**Leticia Ribeiro Nobre<sup>1</sup>, Pedro Policarpo da Costa<sup>2</sup>, José Atylla Teles de Albuquerque<sup>3</sup>, Francisco Junior Menezes Carvalho<sup>4</sup>, Héder Moreira da Costa<sup>5</sup>, Patrícia Bárbara Candida dos Santos<sup>6</sup>, Maico Danúbio Duarte Abreu<sup>7</sup>, Rosa Mônica de Oliveira<sup>8</sup>, Célio Pereira Barbosa<sup>9</sup> and Flávia Mariama Gonçalves França<sup>10</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Degree in Education and Mathematics  
Faculdade M-Educar e Unopar  
E-mail: lrnobre08@gmail.com  
Croatá - CE  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-2985-4336>

<sup>2</sup> Languages and Literature - UVA  
Law - FLF/UFC  
Coreaú - CE  
E-mail: adv.pedropolicarpo@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Degree in History  
Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú  
Coreaú - Ceará  
E-mail: jose.atylla@gmail.com

<sup>4</sup> Master's Degree in Physics Education  
IFCE  
Coreaú - CE  
E-mail: francisco.costa@prof.ce.gov.br

<sup>5</sup> Master's Degree in Education  
Chistian Business Scholl - National Recognition - Universidade Metropolitana de Santos – UNIMES  
E-mail: hederp84@gmail.com  
Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/6048431113717394>

<sup>6</sup> Specialist in Distance Education Tutoring and Higher Education Teaching, 2022  
Facuminas  
Macapá - AP  
E-mail: patriciabarbara.contato@gmail.com  
Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7784134014670653>

<sup>7</sup> Degree in Physics and Mathematics  
Escola Técnica Everardo Passos  
Pelotas - RS  
E-mail: maicodanubio@yahoo.com.br  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8654-8493>

<sup>8</sup> Social Worker  
FIT - Faculdades Integradas do Triângulo  
Uberlândia - MG  
E-mail: rmoliveira.1@hotmail.com

<sup>9</sup> Postgraduate qualification in Pedagogical Mediation in the Context of Decree No. 12,456/2025, from the FAMEESP - Faculdade Metropolitana do Estado de São Paulo  
Dourados - MS  
E-mail: celiopereira0684@gmail.com  
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-2630-313X>

<sup>10</sup> Administrator  
Estácio de Sá de Belo Horizonte  
Belo Horizonte - MG

### **Abstract**

Mental health, teacher education, and teaching work in contemporary society are fundamental issues in light of the social, educational, and technological changes that have been reshaping the conditions under which teaching is performed. This qualitative literature review aims to analyze the main psychosocial challenges faced by teachers, considering working conditions, the construction of professional identity, the demands of inclusive education, the incorporation of digital technologies, and policies concerning teacher education and professional appreciation. The methodology was based on an analysis of scholarly publications concerning mental health, teacher education, and teaching work in the contemporary educational context. The results indicate that work overload, work intensification, institutional demands, the need for continuous professional development, and difficulties related to inclusion and the use of new technologies may contribute to stress, emotional strain, and occupational burnout. Conversely, continuing education, institutional support, professional recognition, collaborative relationships, and adequate working conditions emerge as important protective factors. It is concluded that promoting teachers' mental health requires coordinated measures involving care, education, and professional appreciation, together with educational policies capable of ensuring more humane, inclusive, and sustainable working conditions.

**Keywords:** Professional identity, Teacher appreciation, Teacher education, Teacher mental health, Teaching work.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Teaching work has undergone significant changes in recent decades, reflecting social, cultural, technological, and institutional transformations that have directly affected school organization and teachers' professional practice. In addition to activities traditionally associated with teaching, such as planning, monitoring learning, and assessment, teachers have increasingly had to address administrative

demands, inclusion processes, the use of digital technologies, continuing education, and social and emotional issues that permeate everyday school life. In this context, discussing the mental health of education professionals has become necessary in order to understand not only individual illness, but also the concrete conditions under which teaching work is performed.

The relationship between teaching work and teachers' health has been discussed in Brazilian educational literature for many years. In analyzing the working conditions of education workers, Codo (1999) drew attention to the prevalence of burnout among teachers, linking occupational strain to the characteristics and demands inherent in teaching. Subsequent studies have reinforced the position that teacher distress cannot be understood in isolation from institutional conditions and the organization of work. According to Gasparini, Barreto, and Assunção (2005), changes within the educational system have expanded teachers' responsibilities without necessarily ensuring equivalent conditions for carrying out these new duties.

In this regard, the intensification of professional activities is an important aspect in understanding the challenges experienced by teachers as an occupational group. Assunção and Oliveira (2009) observe that changes in school organization and the expansion of the demands placed on teachers may result in work overload and intensification. Many of these demands extend beyond formal working hours into periods intended for rest and personal life. Planning, preparing and grading assignments, completing records, participating in professional development, and communicating with students and families are examples of tasks that may increase the amount of time effectively devoted to the profession.

This reality also affects how teachers perceive their profession and construct their identity. According to Nóvoa (1992), teacher education is not limited to acquiring specific techniques or knowledge, as it also involves reflecting on one's own trajectory and professional practice. Teacher identity is continuously constructed and influenced by individual experiences, relationships established within the school, and changes affecting education. Tardif and Lessard (2005) further emphasize that

teaching is essentially interactive work conducted through human relationships, a characteristic that gives it particular complexity and a strong emotional dimension.

In the contemporary context, other issues have become increasingly embedded in teachers' daily work. Inclusive education, for example, requires schools to develop practices capable of serving students with different characteristics, needs, and learning trajectories. Mantoan (2003) argues that inclusion presupposes changes in the organization of schools and in pedagogical practices themselves and cannot be reduced to the mere placement of students within the school environment. For teachers, this process requires education, planning, institutional support, and adequate conditions so that inclusion can be implemented effectively.

Digital technologies constitute another dimension that has changed the ways in which teaching, learning, and pedagogical work are organized. Kenski (2012) emphasizes that technologies alter relationships with knowledge and require new ways of organizing educational practices. Their incorporation into everyday school life offers important possibilities for diversifying methodologies and expanding access to information, but it also requires continuous learning on the part of teachers. When this adaptation takes place without adequate infrastructure, training, or support, it may represent an additional source of pressure in professional practice.

These various demands make it possible to define the problem guiding this study: **How do contemporary transformations in teaching work, particularly those related to working conditions, professional development, inclusion, technologies, and educational policies, affect teachers' mental health and the construction of their professional identity?** This question is based on the understanding that teacher well-being does not depend exclusively on individual coping strategies and that the institutional, organizational, and political aspects structuring the profession must also be considered.

In light of this problem, the general objective of this chapter is to analyze the challenges related to mental health, teacher education, and teaching work in contemporary society, considering their relationship with working conditions, professional identity, inclusion, technologies, and educational

policies. Its specific objectives are to understand the main psychosocial factors associated with strain and distress in teaching work; discuss the importance of initial and continuing teacher education in response to new educational demands; analyze the effects of inclusion and technologies on professional practice; reflect on the construction of teacher identity amid transformations in the profession; and identify possibilities for care, illness prevention, and the appreciation of education professionals.

This study is justified by the need to broaden the debate on teachers' mental health beyond a perspective centered exclusively on the individual. Care policies that disregard working hours, remuneration, professional recognition, schools' material conditions, workplace relationships, and professional development opportunities tend to achieve limited results. According to Esteve (1999), the social changes affecting schools place new demands on teachers and may generate feelings of insecurity, dissatisfaction, and strain when they are not accompanied by the conditions necessary for professional performance.

Understanding teacher mental health therefore entails recognizing the complexity of the work performed in educational institutions and the different dimensions that affect professional practice. Appreciating educators involves adequate teacher education, decent working conditions, social and professional recognition, participation in educational decision-making, and the availability of institutional support networks. By connecting mental health, teacher education, identity, inclusion, technologies, and educational policies, this chapter seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of teachers' experiences and to the discussion of strategies conducive to healthier, more highly valued, and more sustainable professional practice.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **TYPE AND APPROACH OF THE STUDY**

This study is characterized as bibliographic research with a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach. This methodological path was selected because of the need to gather and discuss previously

produced knowledge on teacher mental health, professional development, working conditions, teacher identity, inclusion, educational technologies, and teacher appreciation policies. According to Gil (2008), bibliographic research is conducted using previously prepared materials, particularly books and scholarly articles, enabling researchers to examine different perspectives on a given problem.

The qualitative approach proved appropriate because it enabled the interpretation of phenomena involving professional experiences, workplace relationships, perceptions, practices, and institutional conditions. Minayo (2014) emphasizes that qualitative research addresses dimensions of reality that cannot be reduced solely to quantification, making it possible to understand meanings, relationships, and processes within social phenomena. Accordingly, the study did not seek to measure the occurrence of disorders or establish statistical relationships among variables, but rather to understand how different aspects of the teaching profession are associated with teachers' mental health and well-being in the literature analyzed.

### PROCEDURES FOR SEARCHING AND SELECTING MATERIALS

The literature search was conducted by consulting scholarly publications available in academic databases and repositories, with an emphasis on articles, books, book chapters, and institutional documents related to the topic. Studies published in Portuguese, English, and Spanish were considered when they addressed, either directly or indirectly, teaching work and its relationship with mental health, psychological distress, burnout, teacher education, professional identity, school inclusion, digital technologies, and educational policies.

To guide the identification of publications, descriptors such as “teacher mental health,” “teaching work,” “teacher burnout,” “teacher education,” “teacher identity,” “inclusive education,” “digital technologies in education,” and “teacher appreciation” were used, as were combinations of these terms. The selection prioritized works directly related to the subject of this chapter, as well as studies considered relevant to the conceptual foundation of the discussion.

The inclusion criteria encompassed full texts that contributed to an understanding of working conditions, psychosocial factors, professional development, and contemporary transformations in the teaching profession. Duplicate materials, texts without a direct relationship to the topic, and publications adopting an exclusively technical approach without contributing to the analysis of the psychosocial dimensions of teaching work were excluded.

## ORGANIZATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

After the materials had been identified, an exploratory reading was conducted to determine their relevance to the subject under investigation. This was followed by a selective and analytical reading of the publications, aimed at identifying recurring concepts, findings, and arguments. Gil (2008) notes that reading within the bibliographic research process involves different stages, beginning with recognition of the material and progressing toward a more in-depth analysis of information relevant to the research problem.

The information identified was organized into thematic axes defined on the basis of the study objectives. The first axis encompassed working conditions, overload, the intensification of professional activity, and mental health. The second brought together aspects related to initial and continuing teacher education and the construction of teacher identity. The third focused on discussions of inclusion, diversity, and the expansion of teachers' responsibilities. The fourth addressed the presence of digital technologies and their implications for pedagogical practice. Finally, the fifth axis encompassed studies concerning educational policies, institutional care, and professional appreciation.

The interpretation of the material drew on the principles of thematic analysis, understood as a procedure that enables the identification of recurring units of meaning within a given body of information. Minayo (2014) states that thematic analysis makes it possible to organize qualitative content according to themes relevant to understanding the phenomenon under study. In this sense, the study did

not merely describe the publications, but instead conducted a comparative analysis of the convergences, differences, and relationships among the selected studies.

### DEFINITION OF THE DOCUMENTARY SAMPLE

Because this was a bibliographic study, the sample consisted of scholarly publications and documents selected according to their thematic relevance rather than human participants. Priority was given to authors considered key references in the debate on the teaching profession, work, and teacher education, including Codo, Nóvoa, Tardif, Lessard, Esteve, Assunção, Oliveira, Mantoan, and Kenski, as well as contemporary studies capable of broadening the discussion of challenges found in everyday educational settings.

The selection was not intended to exhaust all existing scholarship on the subject, but to construct a sufficiently diverse theoretical body for discussing the main aspects related to the chapter's subject matter. This procedure is supported by Marconi and Lakatos (2017), according to whom bibliographic research enables a given phenomenon to be examined through contributions that have already been systematized, thereby facilitating the establishment of relationships among different interpretations and schools of thought.

### ETHICAL ASPECTS AND METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Because it relied exclusively on publicly accessible documents and scholarly publications, without the direct participation of human beings or the use of personally identifiable information, the study did not involve direct data-collection procedures with participants. The principles of authorship and intellectual property were observed, and the sources used were cited in accordance with the applicable academic standards.

Among the methodological limitations, it is acknowledged that the diversity of approaches found in the literature may hinder direct comparisons among studies, especially because mental health and

teaching work are investigated across different institutional contexts, educational levels, and theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, this diversity also contributes to a broader understanding of the phenomenon by demonstrating that teacher distress and well-being are influenced by personal, professional, relational, organizational, and political factors.

The methodology adopted therefore made it possible to develop a well-founded analysis of recent transformations in the teaching profession while avoiding an interpretation of mental health as the teacher's exclusive responsibility. The integration of different studies enabled illness and professional appreciation to be discussed as phenomena linked to the concrete conditions of education, work, recognition, and institutional support.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The literature analysis revealed that teacher mental health is related to a set of factors extending beyond the individual dimension and encompassing working conditions, institutional organization, interpersonal relationships, professional recognition, education, inclusion, and the incorporation of technologies into everyday school life. The studies analyzed converge in demonstrating that changes in education have expanded the responsibilities assigned to teachers, making the relationship among teaching, responding to institutional demands, and preserving personal and professional well-being increasingly complex.

### **WORKING CONDITIONS AND TEACHER MENTAL HEALTH**

One of the most recurrent aspects in the literature concerns work intensification. Teaching is not limited to time spent in the classroom. Planning, preparing and grading assignments, maintaining school records, attending meetings, participating in continuing education, assisting students, and communicating with families expand the range of tasks performed by teachers. Assunção and Oliveira (2009) associate

changes in the organization of schoolwork with the intensification of teaching activities, emphasizing that new demands have been incorporated into teachers' daily professional lives.

Gasparini, Barreto, and Assunção (2005) also draw attention to the disparity between the responsibilities assigned to teachers and the conditions provided for fulfilling them. This issue is important because it demonstrates that emotional strain should not be interpreted exclusively as an individual inability to manage pressure. The characteristics of work organization and the material and institutional conditions available directly affect professional experience.

Occupational burnout appears as one possible consequence of this process. In a study of education workers, Codo (1999) had already demonstrated the significance of burnout syndrome in discussions of teaching work. Such strain may manifest as emotional exhaustion, detachment from work, and a diminished sense of professional accomplishment. Maslach and Leiter (2016) reinforce the position that burnout must be understood in relation to the occupational environment, particularly when overload, conflict, lack of recognition, and incompatibility between workers' expectations and the concrete conditions under which they perform their activities are present.

**Table 1**

*Main factors associated with teachers' psychosocial strain identified in the literature*

| Dimension                  | Situations identified                                    | Possible repercussions                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Work organization          | Overload and multiplicity of tasks                       | Fatigue and emotional exhaustion                        |
| Working hours              | Activities performed outside school hours                | Reduced time for rest                                   |
| Institutional demands      | Demands, record-keeping, and pressure to achieve results | Stress and a sense of overload                          |
| Professional relationships | Conflict and lack of support                             | Isolation and professional dissatisfaction              |
| Recognition                | Social and professional devaluation                      | Demotivation and weakened professional identity         |
| Inclusion                  | Pedagogical demands without sufficient support           | Insecurity and overload                                 |
| Technologies               | Constant need for adaptation                             | Pressure to remain up to date and an increased workload |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Codo (1999), Gasparini, Barreto, and Assunção (2005), Assunção and Oliveira (2009), and Maslach and Leiter (2016).

The findings therefore demonstrate that discussing teacher mental health requires attention to the very structure of the work. Interventions focused solely on individual coping strategies may prove insufficient when excessive working hours, precarious conditions, lack of resources, institutional conflict, and lack of recognition persist.

## TEACHER EDUCATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Another important finding concerns the relationship between teacher education and professional identity. Teacher education does not end upon completion of an undergraduate degree, as educational practice requires professionals to remain up to date in response to social, pedagogical, and technological changes. Nóvoa (1992) argues that teacher education must consider professional development and reflection on practice, recognizing teachers as active agents in their own education.

Tardif (2014) emphasizes that teachers' knowledge originates from different sources and is constructed throughout their professional trajectories. This means that teacher identity is shaped not only by the knowledge acquired during initial education, but also by everyday experiences, relationships established within the school, and situations encountered throughout one's career.

In this regard, continuing education may serve a protective function when it responds to teachers' concrete needs. Professional development processes disconnected from the problems encountered at school may be perceived as yet another obligation. By contrast, educational spaces linked to practice, the exchange of experiences, and the collective construction of solutions can strengthen autonomy and a sense of professional belonging.

## INCLUSION AND THE EXPANSION OF TEACHERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

Inclusive education also emerged as an important dimension of the discussion. Expanded access to schooling and recognition of the right to education for students with different needs represent fundamental achievements. However, the effective implementation of inclusion equires material

conditions, teacher training, pedagogical resources, accessibility, and coordinated action among different professionals.

Mantoan (2003) argues that inclusion presupposes the transformation of schools and their practices and cannot be understood simply as a student's physical presence in a mainstream classroom. This perspective makes it clear that responsibility for inclusion should not be transferred exclusively to the teacher.

When teachers are assigned new responsibilities without specific training, resources, or institutional support, a rights-based policy may be experienced in everyday practice as an increased burden. The results therefore indicate that inclusion and teacher mental health should not be treated as competing concerns. On the contrary, adequate conditions for teachers are part of the conditions required to provide genuinely inclusive education.

### DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE REORGANIZATION OF WORK

The presence of digital technologies has significantly changed pedagogical work. Virtual environments, educational platforms, communication applications, and digital resources have become part of different stages of teaching activity. Kenski (2012) observes that technologies affect access to knowledge and the relationships established within the educational process, requiring changes in pedagogical practices.

Technological resources can foster methodological diversification, access to different materials, and new possibilities for interaction. Their benefits, however, depend on the conditions under which they are incorporated. A lack of equipment, connectivity, technical support, and adequate training may turn technology into a new source of difficulty.

Furthermore, the expansion of digital communication has contributed to blurring the boundaries between professional and personal time. Messages, electronic records, platforms, and demands received outside working hours may extend work beyond the physical boundaries of the school. The problem

therefore lies not in technology itself, but in how its use is implemented, organized, and regulated within teaching work.

## EDUCATIONAL POLICIES, CARE, AND PROFESSIONAL APPRECIATION

The analysis also revealed that professional appreciation must be understood broadly. Remuneration and career development are fundamental dimensions, but they do not encompass the entire issue. Adequate material conditions, pedagogical autonomy, professional development, respectful professional relationships, participation in decision-making, and institutional support also affect how teachers experience their profession.

Esteve (1999) draws attention to the effects of social transformations on teaching work, particularly in light of the growing expectations placed on schools and teachers. When demands increase without corresponding institutional support and recognition, feelings of dissatisfaction, insecurity, and strain may arise.

The findings analyzed make it possible to organize the risk and protective factors related to teacher mental health.

**Table 2**

*Risk and protective factors related to mental health and teaching work*

| <b>Risk factors</b>                   | <b>Protective factors</b>                                         |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Work overload and intensification     | Balanced organization of working hours                            |
| Excessive pressure to achieve results | Autonomy and participation in decision-making                     |
| Lack of recognition                   | Professional appreciation                                         |
| Lack of institutional support         | Support from school management and collaborative work             |
| Insufficient training for new demands | Continuing professional development aligned with school realities |
| Difficulties implementing inclusion   | Multidisciplinary teams and adequate resources                    |
| Disorganized use of technologies      | Digital training and the establishment of professional boundaries |
| Professional isolation                | Support networks and collaboration among teachers                 |

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the literature analyzed.

The factors presented should not be understood in isolation. A teacher may simultaneously be exposed to overload, pressure to achieve results, structural difficulties, and limited professional appreciation, thereby increasing the complexity of the professional experience. Likewise, management support, collaborative relationships, and professional development opportunities can contribute to a healthier relationship with work.

## PERSPECTIVES ON CARING FOR EDUCATORS

The main interpretation arising from the analysis is that caring for teachers' mental health requires moving beyond proposals centered solely on self-care. Individual practices for promoting well-being may be useful, but they cannot replace changes in the conditions under which teaching is performed. When problems also arise from overload, precarious conditions, or lack of support, holding teachers exclusively responsible for preserving their own health may obscure the institutional dimensions of work-related illness.

Nóvoa (1992) contributes to this discussion by situating professional development within a perspective that values teachers' experience, reflection, and participation. Tardif and Lessard (2005), in

turn, emphasize the interactive dimension of the profession, demonstrating that teaching involves complex human relationships and significant personal investment. These characteristics help explain why relational and institutional conditions are so important to teachers' well-being.

The synthesis of the results therefore indicates the need for a care policy based on several dimensions: illness prevention, improved working conditions, continuing education, institutional support, strengthened professional relationships, and the social and economic appreciation of teaching. In this sense, mental health and educational quality emerge as interconnected issues. Teachers who have adequate conditions in which to teach, learn, plan, and participate in school decision-making have better prospects of building sustainable professional careers.

The findings therefore reinforce that teacher appreciation must not remain confined to rhetoric. It must be realized through policies and practices capable of recognizing the complexity of the work performed in schools each day. Caring for educators means creating conditions in which teachers can practice their profession with dignity, autonomy, support, recognition, and genuine opportunities for professional development.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study aimed to analyze the challenges related to mental health, teacher education, and teaching work in contemporary society, considering working conditions, the construction of professional identity, the demands of inclusive education, the presence of digital technologies, and educational policies focused on the care and appreciation of teachers. The analysis made it possible to understand that these dimensions are directly interconnected and that changes within the educational landscape affect both pedagogical practice and the ways in which teachers experience and attribute meaning to their profession.

The main findings indicate that work intensification, the multiplicity of roles, pressure to achieve results, administrative requirements, the need to remain continually up to date, and the expansion of teachers' responsibilities constitute significant challenges in everyday professional life. These issues are

compounded by demands related to educational inclusion and the incorporation of digital technologies, which represent important advances in education but require appropriate training, infrastructure, and institutional support so that they do not become additional sources of overload.

The literature analyzed also demonstrated that distress related to teaching work cannot be explained exclusively by individual characteristics. Schools' material conditions, the organization of working hours, relationships within the professional environment, social recognition, autonomy, and professional development opportunities directly affect teachers' experiences. In this respect, strategies focused solely on self-care have limited effectiveness when they are not accompanied by changes in the concrete conditions under which the profession is practiced.

Conversely, elements were identified that may help protect mental health and strengthen professional identity. Continuing education aligned with the school's actual needs, management support, collaborative relationships among professionals, the availability of resources for inclusion, the planned use of technologies, pedagogical autonomy, and professional recognition are relevant to building healthier work environments. Teacher appreciation must therefore encompass not only remuneration and career development, but also adequate conditions in which to teach, plan, learn, and participate in educational decision-making.

As a contribution, the study reinforces the need to address teacher mental health as an issue involving individual, institutional, and political responsibilities, while avoiding interpretations that place sole responsibility for coping with occupational strain on teachers themselves. Promoting the well-being of educators should be integrated into teacher education and appreciation policies, in recognition of the fact that educational quality also depends on the conditions provided to the professionals responsible for its daily realization.

Future research should conduct field studies with teachers working at different stages and in different modalities of education, encompassing various educational systems and regional realities. Qualitative studies based on interviews and focus groups may deepen understanding of teachers'

experiences, while quantitative research may help identify the frequency and distribution of factors associated with mental health strain and protection. It would also be relevant to investigate the effects of digital technologies, inclusion policies, and recent changes in work organization on teachers' well-being.

It is concluded that caring for educators requires recognition that teacher mental health is linked to the very ways in which education and schoolwork are organized. Investing in teacher education, institutional support, working conditions, and professional appreciation is not only a measure to protect teachers, but also an indispensable element in building a more humane, inclusive, and socially committed education system.

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