

ARTICLE

Knowledge of professional contexts in the development of prospective teachers' educators

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ABSTRACT

The article addresses the professional knowledge developed by prospective teachers' educators from the formative courses offered by the institutions where they work. This qualitative-interpretative work was based on Lee Shulman's professional knowledge perspective. It involved the analysis of official and institutional documents related to policies and formative actions aimed at teacher educators, a questionnaire applied to the faculty in human sciences, and an interview with four university professors selected from those who answered the questionnaire. The research participants teach degree courses in human sciences at a federal university in southern Brazil. As a result, the study points out that the teachers' participation in different formative sessions allowed them to develop knowledge about multiple aspects related to the knowledge of professional contexts of higher education teaching, with emphasis on students' and faculty's contexts and institutional and regional social contexts.

KEYWORDS

professional knowledge; professional development; teaching in university; education of prospective teachers' educators.

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CONHECIMENTO DOS CONTEXTOS PROFISSIONAIS NO DESENVOLVIMENTO DE FORMADORES DE FUTUROS PROFESSORES

RESUMO

O artigo aborda os conhecimentos profissionais desenvolvidos por formadores de futuros professores a partir de ações formativas promovidas pela instituição em que atuam. O estudo, de natureza qualitativa-interpretativa, apoia-se na perspectiva dos conhecimentos profissionais de Lee Shulman e envolveu a análise de documentos oficiais e institucionais relativos às políticas e ações de formação de formadores de professores, a aplicação de questionário aos docentes da área de Ciências Humanas e a condução de entrevista com quatro professores dentre aqueles que responderam ao questionário. Os participantes da pesquisa são docentes de cursos de licenciatura da área de Ciências Humanas de uma universidade pública federal do Sul do Brasil. Como resultados, o estudo aponta que a participação dos professores em diferentes ações formativas propiciou o desenvolvimento de conhecimentos sobre múltiplos aspectos relativos ao conhecimento dos contextos profissionais da docência no ensino superior, com destaque para os contextos dos alunos, do corpo docente, institucional e social regional.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

conhecimento profissional; desenvolvimento profissional; docência na universidade; formação de formadores de professores.

CONOCIMIENTO DE CONTEXTOS PROFESIONALES EN EL DESARROLLO DE FORMADORES DE FUTUROS DOCENTES

RESUMEN

El artículo discute el conocimiento profesional desarrollado por formadores de futuros docentes a partir de acciones formativas promovidas por la institución en la que laboran. El estudio, de carácter cualitativo-interpretativo, se fundamenta en la perspectiva del saber profesional por Lee Shulman e involucró el análisis de documentos oficiales e institucionales relacionados con la políticas y acciones de formación de formadores de docentes, la aplicación de un cuestionario a profesores del área de Ciencias Humanas y realizando entrevistas a cuatro profesores entre los que respondieron al cuestionario. Los participantes de la investigación son profesores de carreras de grado en el área de Ciencias Humanas en una universidad pública federal em el Sur de Brasil. Como resultado, el estudio apunta que la participación de los docentes em diferentes acciones formativas facilitaron el desarrollo de conocimientos sobre múltiples aspectos relacionados con el conocimiento de los contextos profesionales de la docencia en la docência superior, con énfasis en los contextos de estudiantes, profesores, institucionales y sociales regional.

PALABRAS CLAVE

conocimientos profesionales; desarrollo profesional; docencia en la universidad; formación de formadores de profesores.

INTRODUCTION

Transversely to times and cultures, teaching is constituted as somebody's mediation — a teacher — between the knowledge to be acquired (content, curriculum) and the subject who learns — the student (Roldão, 2014; Richit and Almeida, 2020). To Pérez Gómez (1998, p. 13, our translation), “[...] education, in a broad sense, fulfills an unavoidable function of socialization, since the social configuration of the species becomes a decisive factor in the hominization and especially in the humanization of man.” Given this understanding, the author adds that the function of the school, understood as “[...] an institution specifically configured to develop the process of socialization of new generations, appears purely conservative: guaranteeing social and cultural reproduction as a requirement for the very survival of this society.” (Pérez Gomez, 1998, p. 14, our translation).

Within this understanding, the relevance of the *teacher's professional knowledge* emerges, conceived as a central element of teaching practice and professionalism. In this perspective, the formative processes experienced by teachers throughout their careers must commit to their professional development, permeating the construction and deepening of several types of professional knowledge (Almeida and Richit, 2021).

These aspects show the relevance of the discussion about the knowledge that composes the teaching profession because, according to Roldão (2007), being a teacher is not a gift or vocation: it is a profession supported and legitimized by a complex body of specific knowledge necessary for the teaching practice. Thus, we understand teachers' professional development as a continuous process throughout the teachers' trajectory and that does not end after a certain diploma or title: the constant search for activities that allow the expansion and review of professional practices from new knowledge is essential.

To discuss the professional knowledge inherent to teaching, we based ourselves on Lee Shulman, whose works, started in the 80's, culminated in the categorization of different types of teaching knowledge. From this approach, we direct the discussion to the knowledge mobilized in the teaching professional development processes, specifically in the *continuing education of teacher educators* (professors who teach in degree courses). We dedicated ourselves to investigating the professional development of prospective teachers' educators, seeking to highlight and discuss the professional knowledge built in this process, examining it within the scope of formative actions promoted in a federal university in Southern Brazil.

To do so, we are guided by the following question: “What professional knowledge is mobilized from formative activities offered to the prospective teachers' educators in degrees in Human and Social sciences within the scope of the Federal University of Fronteira Sul (UFFS, in the Brazilian acronym)?” We are interested in *the formation of teachers' educators* because we consider that this process of educating professors who teach in undergraduate courses is one of the main mechanisms for qualifying the process of initial education of teachers for basic education.

The option for the area of Human and Social Sciences is because it is the area with the highest number of teaching degrees on the Chapecó campus, a city in the state of Santa Catarina, headquarters of the UFFS. In this way, this research covers the largest possible number of courses and professors in the same area.

In addition, historical, philosophical, economic, and political issues of the region where UFFS is located contributed to the delimitation of the research context. In that region, a culture originating from colonization, mostly European, and an essentially agricultural economic matrix predominates: the logic of valuing work, production, and the accumulation of goods, linked to a conception of education with an eminently propaedeutic function to the labor market (UFFS, 2019).

KNOWLEDGE AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For Roldão (2007), there is an intrinsic relationship between the nature of each professional role and the type of specific knowledge needed to perform it, and teaching is no exception. The author states that the central question of initial or continuous teacher education is: “[...] what is the necessary knowledge for the teacher to ensure the complex function of teaching as a supporting act of promoting the learning of something by someone?” (Roldão, 2014, p. 96, our translation). Thus, she assumes a perspective of teaching professionalism that starts from

[...] the assumption of the total centrality of professional knowledge, although framed in the web of all the other elements, as a decisive factor of professional distinction, in the phase of the process of the historical evolution of the profession that we are going through, clearly marked by the tension between the jump to a more consistent level of professionalism or the risk of falling back into situations of reinforced proletarianization and functionalization. (*idem*, 2007, p. 96, our translation)

Roldão’s perspective of professional knowledge is anchored in Shulman’s works, which evidenced a triad of knowledge necessary for teaching, widely accepted by academic communities around the world, consisting of *content knowledge*, *pedagogical content knowledge*, and *curriculum knowledge* (Shulman, 1986).

For the author, *content knowledge* refers to knowledge of the content itself, that is, scientific knowledge about the object that makes up the specific domain of the teaching subject. This category of knowledge transcends the limits of the theory and the accumulation of information, entering into the question of their structural organization. Besides explaining a scientific fact, the teacher must be able to explain where it fits within a study area, how one reached that information, or why it is relevant (Shulman, 1986).

Pedagogical content knowledge, from Shulman’s (1986) perspective, defines the knowledge that circumscribes the didactic dimension: the repertoire of forms, strategies, and representations that the teacher uses to explain the *content knowledge*.

This professional knowledge requires the teacher to clarify how easy or difficult it is to assimilate each content. He adds that this dimension needs to be as broad as possible, as students are never the same, always presenting different backgrounds of knowledge and biopsychosocial variables (Shulman, 1986).

Curriculum knowledge refers to knowledge about the broad spectrum of programs and didactic resources designed to teach specific contents at different levels of education. It is from the curriculum knowledge that theory and practice are associated, supporting the teacher's professional practice. According to Shulman (1986), this category of knowledge balances a recurrent tension in teaching between content and didactics where, generally, the focus of the act of teaching tends to be radicalized on one of the two sides.

After this work, Shulman (1987) proposed a new categorization, in a model consisting of seven categories that included other professional knowledge. First, Shulman (1987) separated from *pedagogical content knowledge* aspects external to didactic issues, such as the ones of the principles of classroom organization and management, isolating elements that transcend the subject and the methods used to teach it, thus constituting a new category: the *general pedagogical knowledge*.

Knowledge of learners and their characteristics, which emerged as a new category of knowledge proposed by Shulman (1987), consists of a body of knowledge that transcends didactic issues and resumes the author's understanding that classes and the students who compose them are not homogeneous, nor devoid of prior knowledge. Here we deepen the notion that students have different psychosocial profiles and life stories and different needs, so they require the teacher to know and understand such particularities.

The *knowledge of educational contexts*, in turn, encompasses the heterogeneity dimension of student groups but also knowledge of the characteristics of their communities and cultures. It also encompasses infrastructural issues, such as the management and financing of educational systems (Shulman, 1987).

Shulman (1987) also proposed a category related to the purposes of education called *knowledge of educational ends, purposes, and values*. To realize the purposes of education, teachers need to have more than mastery of content and techniques or a broad view of the context in which they operate: they must be critical of their work and its impacts on society.

Research such as Tanuri's (2000) and Saviani's (2009) show, within Brazilian education, the tensions among European pedagogies that the Brazilian pedagogy emulated. The main focus of these tensions involves the mediation between content and pedagogy, theory and practice. To what Roldão (2014, p. 96, our translation) calls "pendular tendency", Saviani (2012, p. 48, our translation) calls "the bending of the stick": the extreme and intermittent oscillations of focus on educational and formative practice that sometimes put too much emphasis on theory, sometimes relegated it to a background in favor of a practice emptied of content.

By explaining and detailing the multiple and diverse knowledge that permeates teaching practice, Shulman (1986; 1987) denotes the complexity and specificity of the educational act, pointed out by Roldão (2007) as a constituent of its *professionality*. Thus, an in-depth understanding of teachers' professional knowledge can

help balance it in pedagogical practice and in teacher education programs, avoiding pendular oscillations and bending the stick.

Nóvoa (1999) believes it is not possible to imagine a change in any educational scenario that does not pervade teacher education. The author draws attention to the fact that it is necessary to understand education not just as a “formative program” or a mere sequence of specific actions: it is necessary to reformulate the concept of education, placing it throughout the teachers’ different life and career cycles on a path of *personal* and *professional* developments.

Gatti and Barretto (2009) propose a reconceptualization of what is meant by “continuing education”, which goes beyond the exclusive function of filling gaps in initial education and moves to a spectrum of activities that promote the strengthening of teacher practice and their teaching identity.

In this conception of education as a continuum throughout professional life, the underlying concept is that of professional development. The training process is defined as a movement aimed at responding to the various challenges that follow one another in what could be identified as different phases of professional life: the beginning of the career, the development process and the more advanced times in which the teacher consolidates their professional experience. (Gatti and Barretto, 2009, p. 202-203, emphasis added, our translation)

In this perspective, the conception of formation transcends the initial-continuing education dichotomy, as the entire spectrum of activities — both institutionalized and formal and spontaneous —, at any time of the career, is understood as a formative process within the context of teacher professional development. Therefore, thinking about formative processes focusing on teacher professional development means encouraging actions in which the teacher can become a subject in developing the knowledge necessary for practice.

PROFESSIONALISM, KNOWLEDGE, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE FORMATION OF PROSPECTIVE TEACHERS’ EDUCATORS

The literature in the area of teacher education shows some conceptual dispersion on the expression “education of teachers’ educators”. Sometimes the education of teachers’ educators designates the formative process of prospective teachers (degree students), and other times, it refers to educators as any education professionals who promote formative activities. However, we emphasize that, in the scope of this study, we report to the *education of teachers’ educators* as processes of continuing education of university professors working in degree courses, that is, *prospective teachers’ educators*.

However, calling *continuing education* this formative process also proves inadequate within this work’s scope since it seems to diminish the importance and centrality of this process in relation to the concept of teacher *professional development*

throughout their teaching careers. Therefore, we argue for a conception of formation that is not only continuous, but *dialectic* and *permanent*.

Gatti and Barreto (2009) state that the quality of any formative activity is related to the adequate education of professionals who act as teachers' educators in these activities through both their conceptual and practical domain and their commitment to teacher education. The authors point out, however, that continuing teacher education, as it is presented and practiced in Brazil, lacks a solid identity about itself and about the act of teaching, and what theoretical and technical subsidies it needs. They claim that, in practice, educators often do not have such knowledge or necessary subsidies to teach the teachers they are forming. In this way, the education of educators gains relevance, as solid education of educators is essential for preparing new generations of teachers.

Thus, the education of teachers' educators grows in relevance, as it constitutes a process of developing new knowledge, socializing new practices, and discussing teacher education (Richit, 2021). Therefore, professionals who promote such education need to be in the continuous development of their capabilities, constantly reviewing and critically updating their pedagogical practices.

We also noticed that the perspectives of professional knowledge by Shulman (1986; 1987) and of professional development by Gatti and Baretto (2009) complement each other insofar, as they advocate the constitution of a teaching professionalism based on a highly specific set of knowledge.

With regard to UFFS in particular, knowledge of educational contexts (Shulman, 1987) becomes essential, given the specificities of the university, such as its geographical position away from large metropolises and cultural centers and its pioneering spirit as the first federal university in the region and its quite diversified profile of graduates (UFFS, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

The study was based on the qualitative research perspective (Denzin and Lincoln, 2006) to emphasize the eminently social nature of the formative process, examining it in the light of the *different meanings and values* it assumes for each participating professor and how it is reflected in the development of specific knowledge related to teaching. Qualitative research served our purpose of compiling data on continuing education experiences of professors who teach degree courses at UFFS and interpreting them, attributing meanings to them and representing them.

The constitution of the data involved, initially, a documentary survey of the legal orders of the federal bodies and institutions and the UFFS related to higher education professors' education; compilation of documents related to professors' meetings and, especially, calendars, programming outlines and the assessment of the formative activities promoted *at* and *through the* UFFS. We also applied anonymous questionnaires to professors of degree courses in the Humanities area at UFFS. Seventeen professors answered the questionnaire (indicated as "Professor A", "Professor B", etc., in the presentation of empirical

evidence). Finally, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four professors — Artur, Inácio, Simone, and Natália (fictitious names) —, who made themselves available, through indication in the questionnaire of the previous stage, to give us their testimonies.

After organizing the collected material, we proceeded with the pre-analysis, according to the assumptions of Bardin's (2011) content analysis, which define that the pre-analysis stage aims to prepare the material to be cataloged and selected, thus allowing the formulation of hypotheses and objectives to start working with it. The analysis of the empirical material evidenced different aspects related to the categories of knowledge of the prospective teachers' educators, based on which we focus on approaching the *knowledge of educational contexts*.

ASPECTS OF KNOWLEDGE OF CONTEXTS EVIDENCED IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATORS

Regarding knowledge of contexts, Shulman (1987) lists two subtypes. The first refers to knowledge about students and their always unique characteristics, which impact teaching work and challenge teachers to review their practice. The second context is broader, referring to the reality of the institution where the professor works, the profile of their colleagues, the social, local, and regional specificities that interfere with the teaching work.

In our study, we called this category *knowledge of professional contexts*. Through the analysis and interpretation of empirical data, this category was structured into subcategories: students', faculty, institutional, and regional social contexts.

The first aspect of knowledge of contexts refers to the *knowledge of students' context*. This subcategory alludes to the teacher's recognition of the specificities, origins, conditions, and background of students' (prospective teachers) knowledge and experiences as people in development. Two answers to question 7 of the questionnaire — “What is the in-depth topic in work carried out in your highest degree?” — allude to the development of knowledge and perceptions about this variable of teaching work context: “*School complaint*” (Professor K, March 18, 2019) and “*Issues related to gender inequalities*” (Professor N, March 22, 2019).

One of the formative activities promoted by UFFS refers to the development of actions aimed at recognizing the student's context, the “*Teacher education: exchanges of didactic-pedagogical experiences in classes with Haitian students*” (promoted on November 22, 2015). This activity addressed linguistic and cultural specificities in teaching young Haitians who are part of the immigrant population in the UFFS region and face prejudice and economic problems. In this sense, UFFS maintains the Program for Access to Higher Education for Haitian Students (Programa de Acesso à Educação Superior para Estudantes Haitianos — PROHAITI), an action in partnership with the Embassy of Haiti in Brazil, aiming to contribute to the integration of Haitian immigrants into local and national society through access to undergraduate courses at the institution (UFFS, 2014).

In addition to this aspect, the dichotomy between research-oriented and teaching-oriented degrees emerged in our study as an aspect related to the aspirations and difficulties of students who attend that university. Professor Inácio's testimony evidences this aspect: "*Often teaching degree students feel that they are inferior to research degree students*" (testimonial granted on April 16, 2019).

Asked about the changes in practice arising from the transition from teaching a research degree course to a teaching degree course, Artur reveals that his first perception mobilized was precisely related to the difference in profile between the graduates of both courses. In the same tone, when remembering his previous professional experience in another institution, he cites the differences between young people as another element that promotes reflections on the profile of students:

What I could see is a difference in students' socioeconomic conditions. [...] I had many more working students [at UFFS] and, in relation to that, I think it was one of the first impacts. [...] indirectly, there is this socioeconomic issue behind it. [...] and we realize that the challenges in the classroom are always new, because the students are always new, they are different, I think that everything has changed a lot over these almost 18 years of experience. We notice how much the context in the classroom has changed, the behaviors, the cognitive dimension and everything else to such an extent that I don't consider myself an old teacher, much less an inexperienced one, but I wonder how long this type of class that I'm imparting will last [...] if everything is changing, the students are changing. (Transcript of Artur's interview, given on May 2, 2019)

Artur also mentions that the revision of the Projeto Pedagógico do Curso (PPC) of the social sciences course was when he and his peers were mobilized "*for a long time to recognize the contexts of our newcomers and the graduates*" (testimony granted on May 2, 2019), indicating they acknowledged the importance of the debate and promoted it within its collegiate.

Simone, when asked if she perceives the promotion of knowledge about the specificities of the UFFS context from the actions carried out in the institution, signals a gap in this sense, especially regarding the reality of the graduate. She points out the lack of this knowledge at the institutional level as one of the possible causes of evasion and a shallow understanding of the institution about this problem:

[...] this is an urgent demand that we have: to study and better understand who is that newcomer university student. So, as far as I participated in formative processes, this discussion is rarely at stake. We even discussed [...] the need for us to know the causes of evasion, which would require a better understanding of the profile of the students we receive. And then I think that, in fact, we have many things to study. Studying with some care what the working student means, who works during the day and comes to the university at night. (Transcript of Simone's interview, granted on April 17, 2019)

Natália points out the lack of formative activities at UFFS, emphasizing that “[...] *we still must look a little into issues related to who our students are.*” (testimonial granted on April 9, 2019), pointing, therefore, to a lack of knowledge of students’ characteristics and needs.

This lack pointed out by Natália is ratified by other evidence from the answers to the questionnaire applied to the professors. Answering question number 21 of the questionnaire — “Which relevant themes from your point of view were poorly developed in the activities you attended?” —, Professor O, on March 23, 2019, indicated the “[...] *students’ profile in higher education*” as a priority theme. Professor N, on March 22, 2019, answered the same question citing “*Social differences*” as a theme that needs to be better explored and whose reflections certainly permeate the students’ context.

In addition, in the systematization of demands for teacher education, the Social Sciences and Philosophy courses between 2012 and 2014 indicated demands related to the need for knowledge about students’ profile:

Approach to the specificity of night shift students [...]

UFFS student’s profile [...] (Formative demands of the Philosophy collegiate, 2012)

Foreign students. Indigenous students. (Formative demands of the Social Sciences collegiate, 2014)

Another aspect related to the professional context emerged from the analysis of the empirical material: *the faculty context* of the institution, which refers to the profiles and formative paths of the professors who compose the several collegiate courses in the areas of Human Sciences. In this regard, we highlight that, in 2014, the Social Sciences course registered with the Pedagogical Support Center (Núcleo de Apoio Pedagógico — NAP) of the institution, the following demand for teacher education: “*Teaching Degree in Social Sciences versus Research Degree*”, a very present dichotomy in the Humanities courses at UFFS.

About this, Artur points out that it is necessary for professors to recognize the collegiate of the course they are part of and for the collegiate to understand the nature of the course.

[...] but the specific profile of my course, and maybe even of some other UFFS degrees, is that most of the education of tenured professors do not have a teaching a degree. [...] I think there was a lack of natural organicity in a course that comes with professors from different types of backgrounds, there are journalists, there are economists, there are architects, there are different points of view. (Transcript of Artur’s interview, given on May 2, 2019)

Inácio warns that one cannot generalize as to the initial teacher education but emphasizes that there is a specific desirable profile for the teacher educator:

It doesn't mean that we have terrible teachers because of this or that whoever has a teaching degree will necessarily be a good teacher. But, it is expected that those who have a teaching degree are more sensitive to teaching work, to the teaching profession. (Transcript of Inácio's interview, granted on April 16, 2019)

Artur analyzes the differences in the profiles of the professors of the Social Sciences collegiate, indicating that this is a weakness of the course that impacts the academic life of the degree student:

I see that a lot of the students' difficulties in having the courage to face the teaching practice came from the fact that the preservice teacher's advisor had been the last one to be hired via an entrance examination (tenured). So they hadn't had real contact with degree professors until nearly two-thirds of the course. So practically no one spoke to them about school. [...] I think this is where we are perhaps most fragile [...] (Transcript of Artur's interview, given on May 2, 2019)

Natália, in a tone of denunciation, claimed that, within the collegiate bodies in which she operates, there is a "nefarious elitism" of higher education professors. Thus, they fail to know the social and regional contexts, creating expectations that are out of line with students' reality and the university itself.

So, we still have this one that is not a speech, but it is a conception that is kind of implicit. But, you notice it, you do. So, there is elitism. There are teachers who still say: "You must speak two languages!" or "You must read so many books!". And then I ask: Is he/she talking about the Netherlands or is he/she talking about Chapecó? That's not why we won't want to advance in educating the students. But there is still an extremely harmful snob discourse present. (Transcript of Natália's interview, granted on April 9, 2019)

Inácio analyzes the collegiate context of the course in which he works (geography) and points out the lack of consensus or mobilization towards a collective understanding of aspects of the curriculum, such as practices as curriculum components. He mentions that not even institutionalized education was able to cope with this demand:

[...] there are practices as curriculum components that integrate, if not all, but at least most of the subjects of the specific domain, which are teacher education activities, about which there is no consensus. [...] we never tried to build a common understanding within the course about what practice is as a curriculum component, about how it should be organized. (Transcript of Inácio's interview, granted on April 16, 2019)

Inácio also adds that some problems associated with the faculty, specifically the adherence of professors' profiles and practices to the nature and purpose of the course, could be resolved if the process of allocating professors to the curricular components took into account their trajectories, potentialities, and weaknesses:

[...] *we had to reorganize ourselves so that other professors could also take on the teaching practices. [...] And then again, it wasn't just any professor on the course who was allocated to work with a teaching practice. They were two teachers with a vast experience in basic education before teaching in university. Who already had different experiences [...].* (Transcript of Inácio's interview, granted on April 16, 2019)

Simone recognizes that, within the collegiate scope of the course she coordinates, there is resistance to changes, whether they are related to conceptions and practices, which often leads to the reproduction of dissonant models from the course proposal:

There is a lot of resistance indeed. [...] And then we have a very big difficulty opening up to other possibilities. And within this issue, what ends up happening, in general [...] is that this teacher ends up becoming a university professor without this set of, in quotes, "pedagogical knowledge" that would favor their performance as a professor. And, therefore, they reproduce the teaching they experienced, the process in which they were formed. And, in general, [...] their experience is that of a professor who speaks and of students who listen. (Transcript of Simone's interview, granted on April 17, 2019)

Inácio corroborates this aspect by explaining that there is, in addition to resistance, a lack of adherence to the formative processes on the part of professors. He draws attention, however, to the work overload that professors face in higher education, denouncing it as a stimulating factor for such a posture. In general, the analysis of knowledge about collegiate bodies shows a predominance, in the Human Sciences area of the university mentioned, of a research degree profile, which influences pedagogical practices, discussions, and collective work.

Another aspect evidenced in the analysis of the empirical material refers to the *institutional context*, which involves both the immediate institutional scope in which the professor is inserted (university) and the broader scope, referring to higher institutions to which the university is subordinated (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior — CAPES — and Ministério da Educação — MEC —, for example). It also includes norms and guidelines that impact teaching practice and the development of professional knowledge.

This aspect was highlighted in two answers to question 20 of the questionnaire, which dealt with the themes of teacher education promoted at the university mentioned, namely: "*undergraduate and postgraduate assessment systems*" (Professor H, March 18, 2019) and "*dropout*" (Professor O, March 23, 2019).

Asked about the practical consequences of his participation in coordination, commissions, and other institutional instances, Artur cites the articulation of his work as coordinator of the Social Sciences course. He also

mentions reflections mobilized from the formative activities promoted by the UFFS and the exercise of the profession within the institution, revealing a critical knowledge about the differences in institutional culture between spaces in which he worked:

Then there was another experience of mine in academic coordination, which then took place in parallel with the Conference of the Teaching Degrees, a management position in which we find it very difficult to exercise the pedagogical dimension. [...] This, by the way, didn't even make much difference there, this division between research and teaching degrees, I noticed that much more at UFFS. [...] I'm not saying that I would like or think that the only solution was a repetition of the cycle that I experienced at the other institution. I think that here we even profit more from this, because, in these other institutions, we were overloaded, we had more workloads, we couldn't do study exchange between courses, exchange experiences. (Transcript of Artur's interview, given on May 2, 2019)

Artur also highlights issues related to informal training activities, especially the exchange of experiences within the professional culture. Asked about the challenges he sees in teaching at UFFS, he shows that he has developed knowledge of the institution's context and work regime, and that this has translated into a standpoint toward the subject, in which he highlights aspects of the operationalization and bureaucratization of higher education as obstacles to the educational process:

Those professors circulate much. I think that allocating a professor in a subject, in a single course, would facilitate dialogue with them. Because otherwise, a professor needs to circulate in several courses, understand several subjects, needs to understand several courses, negotiate with several collegiate bodies [...] I think this permanence would facilitate exchanges and dialogues. (Transcript of Artur's interview, given on May 2, 2019)

Within the research/teaching degree dichotomy, which appears with some frequency in the participants' speeches, Inácio refers to knowledge of the institution's context, citing general issues of the higher education system that interfere in the students' formation, making considerations about the difficulty of UFFS in educating its professors to teach in the teaching degree and in institutionally recognizing the importance of certain aspects of the pedagogical work:

[...] in part, I agree with this view that there may be a certain predominance of professors with a research degree within teaching degree courses. And then the result of this is all the problems that research courses also have: having professors in higher education who are not initially formed as teachers. [...] Who did not have a formation to be a teacher. [...]. This has something to do with a criticism that I make, the difficulty of the university to educate us to work with a teaching degree and more:

some blindness that exists on the part of the public authorities about how the education should be. Sometimes I think that the decisions taken do not effectively dialogue with what we do at the university. (Transcript of Inácio's interview, granted on April 16, 2019)

Reinforcing the institutional responsibility in the formative process and the difficulties encountered in this field, he also states that “[...] *many of the actions that appear, that are good, that work, are spontaneous, from people who propose to do it, and not from normative, institutional, organized strategies [...]*” (interview given by Inácio on April 16, 2019).

Natália, when remembering formative moments of promoting knowledge related to the contexts of the institution, resumes the question of the elitism of higher education stating that it was the interaction with her peers that revealed this aspect to her:

[...] there is still an extremely harmful snob discourse present. And not just at UFFS. I'm talking about it because that's where I am. But you still see this in [higher] education. [...] Do you know why? Because the professors come from the elite. Very few know what it is to teach in elementary and high school. Public. (Transcript of Natália's interview, granted on April 9, 2019)

Simone highlights the institutional responsibility of UFFS in the education of teaching professionals who work there through the promotion of permanent formative policies for university professors and more comprehensive training programs, citing the institution's Integrated Master Plan (Plano Diretor Integrado — PDI) (UFFS, 2019) as a normative document in which the institution assumes the following commitment:

The university has, then, the obligation to offer this. [...] think of policies from this perspective, of permanent education, offer specialization courses, or disciplines in postgraduate programs, thinking about the permanent teacher education based on their working conditions, their pedagogical practice, organizing, for example, professors' planning processes as formative processes, and not just as processes in which each one presents their plan. [...] To the UFFS, this is very serious because it has teacher education as a fundamental principle and as a fundamental commitment of the institution. If you take the institution's PDI, you will find it there: one of the institution's most severe commitments is teacher education. So it needs to think about policies for educating professors who educate teachers. (Transcript of Simone's interview, granted on April 17, 2019)

Regarding the last question of the questionnaire applied to teachers — “To what extent did the formative activities you attended at UFFS contribute to your professional development and practice?” —, of the 17 respondents, we counted eight markings in the option “*They led me to reflect on the role of the university in the professional prospective teachers' education*”. This was the answer that received the most

marks (almost 50% of respondents), which shows that teachers' educators have a strong perception of the importance and centrality of UFFS in the organization of formative processes that articulate and promote different aspects of professional teaching knowledge.

Regarding the recognition of institutional contexts and the relevance they assume in higher education, we find, in the systematization of teacher education organized by the NAP in 2014, elements that show interest in the subject:

Place of Social Sciences in teaching degree courses. (Formative demands of the Social Sciences collegiate, 2014)

Debate to rethink institutional assessment, that is, to enhance discussions based on institutional self-assessment, carried out by the CPA [Comissão Própria de Avaliação], whose reports and registers must be known, debated, and serve as subsidies for the university to define its present and future trajectory.

Institutional guidelines on undergraduate education are discussed.

Curriculum proposal from other universities reorganized based on the latest international policies. (Formative demands of the Pedagogy collegiate, 2014)

In question number 21 of the questionnaire about underdeveloped themes in UFFS education, Professor O, on March 23, 2019, says that he considered relevant the activities “*about the MEC assessment system (e.g., ENADE)*”.

Within the institutional context subcategory, regarding the immediate institutional context (the UFFS), formative actions that help educators to understand the institution have been developed. The analysis suggests, however, that the institution's formative process could be more systematic and organized.

Within the perspective of a broader institutional context, which goes beyond the university environment and involves higher educational bodies to which it is subordinated, there is recognition of obstacles to the teaching process, such as guidelines and policies that do not effectively dialogue with students' or educators' needs.

Finally, the *regional social context* appears as the last analytical element within the knowledge about professional contexts and refers to the recognition of the impact of the peculiarities of the region in which the UFFS is inserted in the work of the teacher educator, such as local productive arrangements, labor market, required professional profile, indicators of socioeconomic development, social and political relations, and geographic specificities, among others.

When asked about the social impact he envisions in UFFS education, professor Artur believes that the institution's offer (including initial education) for its graduate, in fact, passes through a regional variable:

When the choice was made back then for the courses that the university would offer, who thought about the degrees — and here, we have more courses in Humanities while other campuses have more in Natural Sciences and Exact areas —, they thought, probably,

that we would need to make a revolution from the point of view of education in this region. (Transcript of Artur's interview, given on May 2, 2019)

This part of Artur's statement is validated by the UFFS' PDI, when we find in it that the choice of degree courses at UFFS happens for regional reasons and for valuing the teaching career (UFFS, 2019).

Simone observes that knowledge of contexts, especially regional ones, although necessary, is little addressed. She also makes a connection with other types of knowledge, such as the graduate's profile, getting close to the knowledge of the students' contexts and their characteristics. She also recognizes the *regional perceptions* about the educational process and the students, revealing what she believes to be an ontological conception typical of the region, which echoes the position of professor Natália, who denounces the elitism of higher education.

For example, what does this regional student mean? They are mostly the ones who go to the federal [university]. There is even research on this, but sometimes we hear things, in the hallway, so to speak, that suggests that we have less intelligence going to university. So it reveals, in fact, the need for professorial knowledge. [...] there is an impression that, in this region, you have a "minus". A "being less", as Paulo Freire would say. [...] This is something we hear quite often: this thing about the "level", in quotes, the "level" of competency or ability to learn from UFFS students. But there are things that must come before thinking about the "level". (Transcript of Simone's interview, granted on April, 17 2019)

An answer to question number 21 of the questionnaire, related to the themes of training offered by UFFS that need further development, points to this subcategory tangent to the regional specificities of educational work, indicating "*Social differences*" (Professor N, March 22, 2019) as a topic that needs to be better discussed in the institution's education processes.

As in the knowledge of the students' contexts, the analysis shows eminently socioeconomic variables; however, it also reveals subjective conceptions shared by teachers about what a student in the region is and how education in the region should be configured.

DISCUSSION AND FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Shulman (1987) characterizes two types of knowledge about the specificity of educational contexts: knowledge of students' characteristics and knowledge of educational contexts. This article addresses these aspects in an articulated manner, characterizing the category called *knowledge of professional contexts*, which consists of knowledge related to the contexts of students, faculty, and institutional and regional social contexts.

The *students' context* is a set of aspects related to personal characteristics and the social reality of students that influence teaching processes and impact academic learning. This aspect of knowledge inherent to teaching, especially in teaching degree

courses, allows teachers to analyze and reorganize their practice, seeking to adapt it to the students' more concrete demands (Shulman, 1987). In this perspective, teaching asks the teacher to be able to respect the differences in students' profiles and needs and take advantage of them in redefining their practice, reallocating their knowledge and practices (Freire, 1996).

The analysis showed that professors have faced challenges in teaching at UFFS, especially in relation to the diversity of student profiles served by this institution. Due to the social, cultural, and ethnic diversity of the population in the region covered by the UFFS, located in a region of indigenous lands and populations, colonized by European immigrants and which absorbs a large contingent of Haitian immigrants, and whose productive matrix strength is in agribusiness, different challenges emerge daily in the professors' practice.

Another aspect related to the profile of UFFS students is that most face double shifts work/study, as they need to collaborate in the family's agricultural activities or provide for their own subsistence when they live in urban areas, which brings many complications to learning. According to the professors interviewed, this diversity poses great challenges to teaching. On the other hand, it gives rise to ontological conceptions prevalent in the region and their impact on the educational process. In this sense, the analysis showed that the degree courses implemented in the *campus* surveyed were defined in synergy with the social and economic reality of the region and, especially, the local needs for teacher education.

Another aspect of knowledge of the professional context refers to the *faculty*, that is, the collective made up of teacher educators. In our analysis, the prospective teacher educator is not taken in isolation as in the teaching profession, but rather within the context of the teaching staff to which he/she is affiliated, that is, the degree course to which each professor is linked. The analysis showed, firstly, that, within the scope of the collegiate bodies of the degree courses in Human and Social Sciences areas, there are distinct understandings about the nature of these courses, their purposes, and underlying pedagogical bases. Regarding the focus of the course and the collegiate, a research-oriented view of teaching still predominates, even in the face of the obvious explanation of the objective of the teaching degree courses being prospective teachers' education. The implicit adherence to different conceptions impacts the cohesion of collective teaching work within the course, as postulated by Nóvoa (1999), thus evidencing the need for teacher knowledge capable of observing and acting on collective teaching professionalism and making explicit all the concepts and objectives related to the educational act, as recommended by Shulman (1987).

The respondents point out that it is also necessary to have knowledge of the professional and academic trajectories of each professor that makes up a collegiate: their research, previous teaching experiences, strengths and weaknesses so that the subjects could be better distributed among them. Among the challenges that emerge as a result of the educators' trajectories, according to the testimonies given to us, is that part of the students' fear of starting their practice — as pointed out in the aspect of knowledge about the students' difficulties in

didactic knowledge — comes from the fact that, in some courses, the professors had never talked about teaching practice or schools. This also stems from the fact that the professors responsible for supervising this curriculum component had never actually worked with teaching practice and had never entered a school or even identified themselves with the theme.

Within the mobilized knowledge about their collegiate course, the participants reveal peers' resistance against reviewing content knowledge, teaching methodologies, and assessment. In this sense, this work advances in welcoming this dimension of the constitution of teaching knowledge, given that the systematic review of the literature showed the emergence of this topic in the research done in the last decade.

In its *micro* (referring to UFFS) and *macro* (suprainstitutional, related to the bodies and policies to which the university is subordinate) dimensions, the *institutional context* stood out for its potential to influence other knowledge necessary for the educators' teaching. Here is yet another branch: to strengthen the professors' knowledge about the institution in which they work, the immediate institutional context, UFFS often offered a formative activity to welcome and acclimatize the institution's new professors, in which several facets of the institutional work were explained to the new coming professors. Thus, this work sought to overcome what, according to Gatti and Baretto (2009), is a common limitation found in research on the education of teachers' educators, which is the lack of institutional commitment to the formation of its teachers. It is a movement that also mitigates the oppression of the bureaucratic dimension, pointed out by Melo (2010) as hampering better dedication of the newly arrived professor to more pedagogical aspects of their practice.

The analysis showed professors' refined perception of the specificities of the UFFS in relation to other educational institutions they had been, mobilized not only by the activities of formation and pedagogical reception but also by the insertion of the professors in groups, commissions, and career advancement, which allows them to understand better the institutions involved in the teaching process. They also highlighted the need to develop knowledge regarding the policies and institutions that govern the educational processes, in which the participating professors point out the impossibilities and obstacles faced in the immediate institutional work due to legislation and federal education bodies.

Therefore, the analysis shows that, despite the effort of the UFFS to strengthen professors' knowledge of the institution and its methodologies, values and objectives, many actions arise from their spontaneity and individual or collective initiative. Study participants argue that there is an individual responsibility but, especially, an institutional responsibility in promoting formative actions, as announced by Zabalza (2004) and Gatti and Baretto (2009).

The knowledge of *regional social context*, which involves the geographic, economic, and sociopolitical specificities of the location where UFFS is located, was very evident in our analysis, also associated with other aspects of knowledge of professional contexts, such as knowledge of learners' contexts. Certainly, the regional needs arising from socioeconomic arrangements and the subjective conceptions

and perceptions that they produce in the way of life in the region also impact the conceptions and visions about education and must be apprehended and worked on by the educator.

Alluding to Silva's (2013) work, we corroborate her assertion of the absolute need to observe and study the geopolitical variables that impact the work of teacher educators. The analysis of knowledge related to regional contexts dialogues, finally, with its growing importance, as evidenced by Silva and Fernández (2015), and advances by explaining its need in terms of the federal university project that the UFFS aims and its prominent role in the mesoregion.

In summary, the advance in research on the professional development of prospective teachers' educators, based on the deepening of different aspects of professional knowledge as a way of legitimizing the professionalism of this professional group, is possible when we recognize the personal and institutional responsibilities intertwined in the educational process and when we seek to overcome models of blaming or simply pointing out failures.

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