

## Pedagogy for the oppressed: inequality and career choice in teaching

*Pedagogia para a oprimida: desigualdade e escolha de carreira no magistério*

*Pedagogía para las oprimidas: desigualdad y elección de carrera en la enseñanza*

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### ABSTRACT

The paper derives from an ongoing research carried out with students of the degree course in pedagogy at the Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais (UEMG), Barbacena Unit. Taking as a reference the growth of enrollments in this modality of training in higher education, which contradicts the decrease in the number of graduates in other degrees, as observed in the Census of Education, it is asked, from the socioeconomic origin of the study sample, what the great growth in enrollments in pedagogy courses in recent years reveals about the national scenario regarding training in higher education and Brazilian inequality. The predominance of socially and economically impoverished women among students leads to questions about their freedom to choose a career and the consequences regarding the representations constructed in relation to teaching.


**Keywords:** Degree in Pedagogy. Social Inequality. UEMG.

### RESUMO

O artigo deriva de uma pesquisa em andamento feita com estudantes do curso de licenciatura em pedagogia da Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais (UEMG), Unidade Barbacena. Tomando como referência o crescimento das matrículas nessa modalidade de formação no ensino superior, que contraria o decréscimo do número de graduandas/os nas demais licenciaturas, conforme observado no Censo da Educação, pergunta-se, com base na origem socioeconômica da amostra do estudo, o que o grande crescimento das matrículas nos cursos de pedagogia nos últimos anos revela sobre o cenário nacional quanto à formação no ensino superior e a desigualdade brasileira. A predominância de mulheres social e economicamente empobrecidas entre as/os estudantes leva ao questionamento sobre a sua liberdade de escolha de carreira e as consequências quanto às representações construídas em relação ao magistério.

**Palavras-chave:** Licenciatura em Pedagogia. Desigualdade Social. UEMG.

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## RESUMEN

El artículo deriva de una investigación en curso realizada con estudiantes de la carrera de pedagogía de la Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais (UEMG), Unidad Barbacena. Tomando como referencia el crecimiento de la matrícula en esta modalidad de formación en la educación superior, que contradice la disminución del número de egresadas(os) en otras carreras, como se observa en el Censo de Educación, se pregunta, desde el origen socioeconómico de la muestra de estudio, lo que el gran crecimiento de las matrículas en cursos de pedagogía en los últimos años revela sobre el escenario nacional en cuanto a la formación en la enseñanza superior y la desigualdad brasileña. El predominio de mujeres social y económicamente empobrecidas entre los estudiantes lleva a cuestionamientos sobre su libertad de elección de carrera y las consecuencias sobre las representaciones construidas con relación a la docencia.

**Palabras clave:** Licenciatura en Pedagogía. Desigualdad Social. UEMG.

## INTRODUCTION

This study opens the door to understanding the reasons why there has been a huge increase in enrollment in teacher certification courses in pedagogy [for early childhood and elementary school teachers] in Brazil, considering the growing discrediting of the teaching profession and the significant reduction in enrollment in other teacher accreditation courses. The argument takes the following path: if the opportunities for social advancement through teaching are falling out of favor, with a visible drop in student enrollment in other teacher accreditation courses, why is there growth in pedagogy? What option does pedagogy offer to a significant portion of the Brazilian population?

To shed light on these questions, in addition to the data from the 2020 Education Census, a bibliographical survey was conducted on access to higher education in Brazil. Who can choose to seek a degree in higher education? What degree? From there it is demonstrated how the opportunity for choice is restricted to certain social classes, the wealthier ones, while the more impoverished have limited options. Allied to this perspective, we take the conditioning factor of class as a reference to position agents in their choices in relation to their social practices, in the social grouping to which they belong. As such, we examine whether the choice is a rational calculation or the reproduction of such practices, considering subjective aspects.

In addition to limitations related to class position, this paper also analyzes those related to being a woman in society. This, like class, influences behavior, the degree of autonomy and the range of advantages or disadvantages an individual has throughout life. The inclusion of these two variables (or conditioning factors) is necessary in this study, in which women were more than 90% of those interviewed. Public and private, as Biroli (2014) points out, are not distinct and isolated spheres; to the contrary, they are complementary dimensions for understanding power relations and therefore the opportunities available in society. This means that the characteristics and behaviors found in an exclusionary domestic environment, identified in the interviewees' profiles, are also present in academic life. Thus, once in a pedagogy course, one of the few options for higher education and consequent social ascension, their condition as oppressed becomes evident, in a sense very close to that developed by Paulo Freire.

For this project, we looked at the teacher certification in pedagogy course at the Dona Itália Franco Higher Education Institute of the Minas Gerais State University (UEMG), Barbacena Unit. We interviewed the students to understand their social origin, and find the basis for an understanding of their choice.

This article is divided into five sections, in addition to the introduction. The first looks at the number of registrations in teacher accreditation courses in Brazil, with special attention to pedagogy. These teaching careers are problematized in a discussion about the prestige of teaching and the social ascension made possible by higher education, shedding light on the identity of this pedagogy student.

The second section promotes a theoretical discussion in the context of inequalities in Brazil, as well as the opportunities for choosing paths in higher education. It shows how Brazilian higher education reproduces inequalities by allocating more and less prestigious courses, in a systematic dialog with the social structure.

The third and fourth sections present data collected from UEMG's pedagogy students, opening precedents to discuss their social origin, comparing them directly with the national scenario and highlighting how women are the protagonists of growth in the number of students enrolled in teacher certification in pedagogy courses. The fifth and final section contains the final considerations and their attempt to answer some of the questions posed, finding links with debates started at other times.

## ENROLLMENT IN TEACHER ACCREDITATION COURSES IN BRAZIL

The first decade of the 2000s was marked by an increase in enrollment in higher education in the country. Public policies directed resources for this purpose by creating new universities, expanding consolidated and instituted ones, financing tuition fees for students at private institutions of higher education, and stimulating technologies for online courses, as well as policies to keep low-income students in school so that they can complete their chosen courses, among others.

The Brazilian state has clearly invested heavily in this expansion. The argument that supports the initiative focuses on the need to overcome inequality and complexify the workforce in a modern society, following the premise that increasing the population's schooling would contribute to other mechanisms, such as raising income, for example.

This goal is based on the premise that access to higher education had been difficult for the poorest part of the population. Guaranteeing a degree for young people from the bottom of the pyramid involves an attempt to allow a symmetry between the complexification of the Brazilian productive structure and the production of skilled labor, so that, in theory, this portion of society would not find itself on the margins of the modernization process experienced in recent years. The merit of this initiative is unquestionable. However, it must be closely examined.

In recent years, data from the educational census has shown that despite public policies to democratize higher education, enrollment rates in this sector have been falling in practically all spheres. However, one exception is significant and draws considerable attention: *teacher certification in pedagogy*, which is experiencing an increase in demand, in contrast to the trend observed.

In the 2020 School Census, teacher certification in pedagogy was the in-person course with the second most enrollments in higher education in the country: 43,778 students in the federal network alone. In 2009, there were 564,645 pedagogy students in Brazil's public and private networks. In 2019, there were 815,959, representing an increase of more than 44% in enrollment over this short 10-year period. This number represents 48.3% of all students enrolled in teacher certification courses in the country, both in-person and distance learning, in public or private schools (INEP, 2020). Nearly half of all students in teacher certification courses currently study pedagogy.

In a universe of 304 public higher education institutions (HEIs) and another 2,153 private ones, it is possible to see, from 2013 to 2020, an accumulated drop in enrollment of 14.3% — between 2019 and 2020 alone, the reduction was 6% in public ones and 3.1% in private ones. The courses

leading these reductions<sup>1</sup> are teacher certification courses in biological sciences (a 24.8% drop), chemistry (a 19.9% decline), geography (19.7%), social sciences (18.9%), physical education (18.2%), philosophy (13.5%), language and literature (12.3%) and history (9.2%). Overall, fewer professionals graduated in 2020 than in 2016. However, as we have seen, even in this scenario of reductions, pedagogy courses have seen an increase in students (INEP, 2020).

Given this situation, there is a need to consider the stimulus behind the initiative to strengthen education in Brazil, in terms of professional training for students in pedagogy courses. The huge number of professionals with teacher certification makes it essential to understand the social particularities involved in this universe, to gauge the motivations for the high demand, the expectations created when at university, and the representations built around the profession to be exercised after graduation.

Despite the quantitative increase in pedagogy courses in Brazilian higher education, few studies have focused on the students in this field. Noteworthy are Cerqueira *et al.* (2004), Narvaes (2004), and Sales and Chamon (2011), who, however, do not focus on the interests of this public, and their prospects for remaining in the teaching profession. Their studies focus on the motivation for the students' choice, that is, elements that are pertinent when questioning the expectations and representations of these students and future professionals.

The increased precariousness of working conditions could be one way of assessing this impact. In this context, low teacher pay is also relevant. Facci *et al.* (2004), Lüdke and Boing (2004) and Oliveira (2004) show how the loss of prestige of the teaching profession echoes the working and living conditions of teachers. Their studies suggest that questions should be asked about the opportunity for social advancement through a degree — a point that should be strongly considered when examining the circumstances of Brazilian inequality.

This scenario also compromises professional identity in the teaching profession (Lüdke and Boing, 2004). There is a growing negative impression of teaching, making it difficult for individuals to identify themselves with the profession in a class society with more complex activities, as Florestan Fernandes (2008) affirmed is a characteristic of modern Brazil. In the latter case, we can see the social interference of the representations created by this professional grouping in the formation of Brazilian society as a whole.

As can be seen, the current scenario is characterized by the low attractiveness of teaching careers. Studies by Souto and Paiva (2013) on the high rate of people giving up teaching in basic education among professionals still at the beginning of their careers support the thesis of the numerous difficulties encountered. Gatti (2009), in her research, argues that the low attractiveness of the teaching career is explained in part by the complexity of the work itself, as well as the current demands of the profession. Fanfani (2007) argues that the consequences of high expectations of educational institutions are compounded by the toll this takes on the teaching staff when it is not able to meet them. Valle (2006) also takes this direction by highlighting the complexity of the teaching profession, which is recognized by a large part of the population.

A survey by the Carlos Chagas Foundation (Fundação Carlos Chagas, 2009) found that only 2% of high school students chose pedagogy or another degree as their option in college. In this respect, the initial grades of elementary school were the least desired by the few who opted for this career. The study also found that many of those interviewed do see going to higher education as a chance to move up the social ladder, generating expectations about professional practice. Studying at

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1 The enrollment reductions presented here accompany those in demand for the courses — freshman enrollment — and a growing dropout rate (INEP, 2020).

university is an important steppingstone for social advancement; however, if it were up to these young people to choose, this would not happen through teacher certifications.

In short, the devaluation of the teaching profession in Brazil today is evident, as seen in society's perception in general and through the observation of objective data, which contributes to understanding the great reduction in demand for seeking teacher certification in higher education. However, as we have seen, this does not apply to pedagogy courses. The proposal here is to reflect on reasons that may have led to increased enrollment in these courses throughout Brazil.

## HIGHER EDUCATION, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, *HABITUS* AND THE OPPRESSED

The increase in the number of graduates in teacher certification in pedagogy also presupposes an increase in the number of elementary school teachers in the job market. It is disturbing to ask about the expectations, motivations and representations that these students have about their desired profession — given that information about teaching is generally unfavorable in Brazil today. To begin to understand this fact, we should ask about the social origins of these students, following the hypothesis that this influences their choice of higher education.

The careers such as teaching are preferences for the poorer social classes, as shown below. The universalization of access to higher education, in theory, supports democratization and helps to overcome the social inequality characteristic of Brazil.

The relationship between classes, which is conflictual by nature, does not disappear simply because some of the participants in the social interaction gain a new resource. Rather, class relations transmute into a new format, and inequality can take on a different shape as a result of the insertion of new instances and institutions into the dialectic in play, establishing a principle of reproduction (Bourdieu, 1982)

Contrary to the argument that education strengthens democratization, Borges demonstrates that the supposed freedom to choose a career in higher education is actually limited. He affirms that the “choice of profession depends to a greater extent on social conditioning than on an actual calling or vocation” (Borges, 2018, p. 496). This is because the most prestigious careers certainly continue to have clear limitations, whether in terms of tuition fees — even if public funding is available, individuals with serious financial obstacles may not seek it out of fear of not succeeding — or in terms of competition in the selection processes that is evident in universities, even if this is supported by the National High School Exam — Enem [a national university entrance exam that creates opportunities to enrollment] (Bourdieu, 2014; Moris *et al.*, 2022). The preparation needed to get into a more prestigious course is long term and demands heavily from a student's trajectory, as it presumes various other social resources, such as cultural, social and economic capital, among others (Moris *et al.*, 2022).

As Bourdieu points out, education is fundamental to maintaining the status and social ascension of the middle classes. This logic, now applied to the most economically vulnerable, may represent one of the only ways to create an imaginary of social projection beyond the sphere of work. This is how the expansion and diversification of higher education has been commonly understood as synonymous with democratization. However, Sá (2022) disputes this, pointing out that new entrants bring inequalities with them, although reconfigured, into the classroom.

Bourdieu's analysis of the universalization of access to French higher education in the 1960s shows that it is the characteristics of the classes that determine their choices (Bourdieu, 1982). The path is closed to, or presents much greater obstacles, for those who are traditionally on the margins of society, restricting their taste or affinity for a specific career (Ristoff, 2014; Salata, 2018; Moris *et al.*, 2022). It is difficult for a young person from a lower social class to limit their access

to higher education solely on the basis of taste, affinity with their chosen career or vocation. The expectation of social ascension prevails (Salata, 2018).

For the purposes of this article, the concept of *habitus* proves to be an interesting tool for understanding the reasons for the growing demand for a degree in pedagogy considering the discreditation of other degrees. This is because *habitus* presumes the internalization of exteriority and the externalization of interiority, signaling a reconciliation of the apparent opposition between exterior reality and individual realities (Bourdieu, 1989; Setton, 2002; 2009). Individuals, inserted in a certain social structure, carry cognitive traits from their social reality which, in this case, may bring interesting points to explain the attractiveness of pedagogy.

Furthermore, *habitus* should be thought of as a socialized subjectivity. It reinforces the interdependence between individuals and society. As such, the perspective pedagogy students' have about their education considers both subjective principles — such as individual experiences — and objective principles, consistent with the realities in which the individuals find themselves. In this specific case, it is a highly unequal reality, whose premise of asymmetry, emphasized by the logic of one of the only opportunities in higher education open to them, is placed before the subjects in question. In sum, it is elements characteristic of the social practices of individuals who are pre-applicants to become teachers that induce them to opt for this career.

According to Setton, “individual actions, behaviors, choices or aspirations do not derive from calculations or planning, but are rather products of the relationship between a *habitus* and the pressures and stimuli of a conjuncture” (Setton, 2002, p. 64). To problematize this, it is worth noting in this case the differentiation made by the author between the concept of *habitus* in Durkheim and Bourdieu. This is because *habitus* does not allow for the simple reproduction of the structures of which it is a product, as Durkheim would indicate, and it is not possible to reconstitute a subject's *habitus* based on their practices within a given social structure and its institutions, such as schools. To the contrary, it would have an impact on reproduction.

Portraying work with education and knowledge as being pleasurable, in an effort to shape new habits, would not be enough to change an individual's entire way of life. In other words, no matter how much educational institutions like universities are consolidated in society, students do not simply acquire a new culture, a new way of thinking. It is impossible to restrict oneself to a Durkheimian principle of morals, in which norms are instilled in the subject through a complex process of teaching and learning, to summarize Durkheim's coercive logic. If this were the case, the idiosyncrasies of students within institutions would not be observable, as there would be a tendency for them only to replicate institutional norms (Setton, 2002).

With Bourdieu's studies as a reference, it is worth using his idea of the “selected”. This is because, based on an analysis of the French education system, the selection made through the college entrance exam is fundamental to accrediting certain individuals in specific social practices present in university life. More than just selecting students for academic life, there is an almost liturgical process to promote the acceptance, or not, of individuals who share the same social codes — or, at least, the minimum requirements for acceptance of the social codes they will experience during university. In this way, the social resources characteristic of university life are exclusive to a few: those belonging to the middle class and above (Bourdieu, 2014).

This suggests an affinity between life at university and life outside it for those who want to enter. If we look at the logic of pedagogy, something along these lines can perhaps be observed when we investigate the social origins of the students who want to become teachers. Differentiated university environments are thus formed according to the social classes involved. There is a clear link with the idea of mass participation in higher education, as pointed out by Borges:

The massification of higher education does not mean that democratization is actually taking place, as it is necessary to define who the expansion is aimed at, given that the middle classes may benefit more from the process, as they are able to invest more in their children's education. The question is to assess how the selection process takes place and to what extent it guarantees equal opportunities for individuals from different social backgrounds and, subsequently, how less well-off individuals manage to develop their studies. (Borges, 2018, p. 497)

François Dubet goes in the same direction by pointing out that social inequality, to a large extent, changes its background in a scenario of universal access to higher education. As he points out, “the higher the social origin of individuals, the more they have the opportunity to attend higher education” (Dubet, 2015) — a premise confirmed by Moris *et al.* (2022). It is inevitable that this inequality will be reproduced in the university environment, a fact that is especially noticeable when it comes to careers that are considered the most prestigious (Almeida and Ernica, 2015; Carvalhaes and Ribeiro, 2019).

This last point influences, for example, identification with a course, as well as students' expectations, motivations and, of course, their representations of careers during the educational process. The inequality signaled by Dubet, in a cultural context, persists and serves as a thermometer to demonstrate the perpetuation of social asymmetries, regardless of the mechanisms for increasing access to education (Dubet, 1996).

Dubet insists on the democratization of higher education and its process of reproducing inequalities. This is because, if there is a free higher education system in an unequal society, there is also an asymmetry within the system itself, which is visible in the fact that some courses and careers are more socially prestigious than others. This point has been verified in empirical research of the Brazilian reality (Almeida and Ernica, 2015; Carvalhaes and Ribeiro, 2019; Sá, 2022).

The search for more prestigious careers tends to be made by a social grouping that traditionally has the economic and, in turn, cultural resources to allow them access — the competition takes place at another level (Moris *et al.*, 2022). The opposite is true of less prestigious careers, such as teacher accreditation and, in turn, pedagogy — which allows deductions to be made about the social group seeking this career.

Thus, Dubet questions how the democratization of higher education should be encouraged. Would it be better to allow the more modest to have access to the most prestigious careers, and have to confront the cultural inequalities that may exist there, reinforcing this inequality to some extent; or to follow the opposite path, encouraging careers more in line with their needs, in which the inequality evident in the cultural system would be less present, with less impact on negative statistics, such as course dropouts (Dubet, 2015)?

Trajectories in higher education, following the *habitus* principle, reinforce the social structure and, consequently, the inequality that exists in a society.<sup>2</sup> This does not mean that individual successes in particular trajectories should not be considered. Lahire's attention has been focused on them in recent studies of his work as a youth. The author argues that singular trajectories should be more valued as a mechanism for evaluating social actions. Thus, a subject who has a very unique trajectory would be able, to some extent, to move freely, transforming and being transformed by the other structure in which they are inserted, without, however, abandoning the repertoire of a life built on their own experiences (Lahire, 2002).

2 This should in no way be disregarded as a mechanism for overcoming social inequalities. However, from a cultural perspective, this inequality is reinforced considering the structural logic of its constitution.

Thinking about higher education, Lahire argues that individuals who occupy socially and economically inferior positions can transform themselves and transform a reality that requires cultural capital that they are not habituated to (Nogueira, 2021). For example, these individuals, on entering higher education, in more prestigious courses, would be able to acquire the cultural capital to carry out transformations and, consequently, to insert themselves into the sphere required by this instance. Through his examples of success, Lahire's perspective sounds optimistic. The French sociologist, although inspired by Bourdieu, either to adhere to him or criticize him, tries to expand his vision by giving more dynamism to social changes from a sociology with a micro-sociological framework, attentive to individual experiences (Lahire, 2002).

In his view, despite their conditions, what matters in a sociological analysis is the willingness of individuals to find themselves within instances of differentiated cultural capital, to the point of allowing them to be more or less successful in carrying out the symbolic exchanges present there. "According to Lahire, disposition is a reconstructed reality which, as such, is never directly observed by the social scientist" (Setton, 2009, p. 302).

This perspective clashes with the premise of *habitus*, which guarantees a balance between agency and structure, i.e. without individual prerogative over the social or vice versa. This is a mutual relationship which helps to explain the difficulty in understanding the concept. On the other hand, Lahire's emphasis on individual trajectories tends to limit the fields of analysis to the individual (Lahire, 2004).

Bourdieu works with "the concept of school *habitus*, for example, as the result of a synergy between the pedagogical projects of the family and the school. In other words, Bourdieu's emphasis is always on complementation and almost never on the coherence of the influences that shape individuals' *habitus*" (Setton, 2002, p. 304). This quote shows something completely different from the idea, defended by Lahire, that the concept of *habitus* involves a determinism and an increased rigidity (Lahire, 2002).

The data from the survey presented in this research make it difficult to support Lahire's thesis. This is because it gives too much emphasis to exceptions, to particular cases. What is most important is that, unlike Lahire's understanding of the notion of *habitus* as a static and generalizing instrument, the concept must be understood from a logic of dynamism that allows the methodological identification of unique traits of a grouping to allow the mapping of a class and its behavior in a social system. Focusing on one particular case or another will not allow identifying global aspects of a social grouping, of a class, in a specific situation, as, in this case, inclusion in higher education.

This assumption is fundamental to guiding the reading of the research results in the following sections. The proposal is to focus on a socio-economic analysis and on initial aspects of cultural data — to be worked on in greater depth at another time. However, assimilation of the information presented here, following the premise of *habitus*, helps to understand the dimension of the logic of reproduction, and facilitates the observation of the status of prestigious and less prestigious courses, as in the case of pedagogy.

This discussion has a close dialog with Paulo Freire's theory and his identification of the oppressed. This is because they hold the values, ideas, needs and interests of the oppressors within their consciousness, taking sides in their world in order to actively reproduce these principles. Therefore, their behavior is oriented towards reinforcing their condition in the oppressive structure, in an unnatural way, that is, it distorts the historical logic that would enunciate the human vocation to "be more" — the fruit of this distortion is to "be less" (Freire, 1987).

Paulo Freire uses the concept of the oppressed to give movement to his theoretical formulation, ensuring that 1. the position occupied by the subject is not something natural and, therefore, 2. it is not static, presupposing the imminent possibility of movement, of the rupture of a condition, to use



the author's own terms. However, in view of the incidence of external elements in its characterization, as well as its subjective force, which reconfigure individuals' understandings of their reality and condition — formulating justifications for their class position, in a logic of structuring structured structure — it is thought that a dialogue between the *oppressed* and *habitus* would be useful.

On this basis it can be understood that education, for Freire, is a painful process, requiring the oppressed to constantly reflect on and ponder their condition — until then, they may be unaware of their own condition as oppressed, the significance of their class position and, consequently, the existence of the oppressor. It is even common for the oppressor to be recognized, but his position could be legitimized, with the oppressed even dreaming of occupying it. To break the oppressive process, an entire structure, as well as a set of truths that support the oppressed throughout their lives, must be problematized, opening the way for a broader understanding of their possibilities for realization in the social structure as a whole — in short, the realization of the vocation to “be more”. Only from this point would education be liberating.

The scarcity of opportunities for an emancipatory education that is capable of moving this process of recognizing the oppressed in terms of their condition, tends, on the contrary, to keep them at the same level desired by the oppressor. And there are various ways in which this can happen, including the institutionalized form of so-called “banking education” — a situation in which the educator is considered to be the one who knows, the one who transmits values and knowledge to the learner, while the learner is where this knowledge is deposited. Finally, for the purposes of this article, it is immediately important to recognize the existence of the oppressed as such, as a common agent, present in everyday reality and far removed from the logic of emancipation.

One of the characteristics of the oppressed, beyond the logic of reproducing the condition of oppression, is circumscribed by the premise of economic misery. That is, poverty is the central point for making the condition of the oppressed a reality — and sustaining it in some way, according to Freire, is circumstantial for the oppressor. The pedagogy of the oppressed “is the pedagogy of men committing themselves to the struggle for their liberation [...]. And one of its subjects must be the oppressed themselves who know themselves and critically begin to know themselves to be oppressed” (Freire, 1987, p. 22).

If we were to leave aside the logic of the oppressed when developing an understanding of how an educational system such as higher education works, in the pedagogy course, as proposed here, the tendency would be to maintain an unequal social structure and its consequent institutional reproduction. Therefore, the preposition “of”, in “pedagogy of the oppressed”, would give way to the preposition “for”, in a “pedagogy for (the) oppressed”, when what is offered sustains its inequality-reproducing orientation.

## PEDAGOGY STUDENTS

To carry out the research, a structured questionnaire containing 122 questions divided into blocks was applied using *Microsoft's Teams* virtual environment, in the *Forms* system. The first — whose data is discussed in this section — focuses on the socio-economic traits of pedagogy students, while the second and third deal with cultural/political aspects and the understanding of the idea of education, respectively. It was administered between November 2022 and February 2023. There were 68 respondents, or 27% of UEMG Barbacena's student body of 252 students.

The Dona Itália Franco Higher Education Institute, at the Barbacena Unit of the Minas Gerais State University (UEMG), is made up of two teacher accreditation courses: social sciences and pedagogy. The emergence of the latter dates back to 2002. The school is co-located with the Tiradentes College of the Minas Gerais Military Police and had a total of 322 students for the two degrees at the time of the research.

Among those interviewed, for 58 (85%) pedagogy was their first degree, while ten (15%) already had a higher education degree. Of the latter, three (4.4%) had technical training in other fields. Following the trend of other surveys, women predominate at Barbacena — 92.6% of the student respondents identified themselves as being of the female gender, while four (7.4%) declared themselves to be men. This data, as mentioned, is similar to the national figure of 92.5% (in teacher accreditation programs in general women account for 71.3%, revealing the discrepancy between these figures even in relation to other teacher accreditation programs), as observed in the Education Census (INEP, 2020) (Table 1).

**Table 1 – Percentage of women among those interviewed at the Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais — Barbacena in relation to the national percentage.**

Pedagogy students	UEMG Barbacena interviewees (%)	Brazil (%)	Other teacher accreditation courses in Brazil (%)
<b>Women</b>	92.6	92.5	71.3

Source: prepared by the author.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

This data is quite significant. Castro and Ferrari focused on this fact, highlighting inequality as a central aspect, signaling the existence of “a network of knowledge and power at work in university curricula for initial teacher training, which constructs the conditions of existence for discussions on gender relations and sexuality” (Castro and Ferrari, 2021, p. 11).

Based on the authors’ premise that gender is a social organizer of the structures and relationships constructed in society, it can be affirmed that the predominance of women indicates the existence of factors prior to entering the course that could make attending a teachers’ college one of the only alternatives for social advancement — this is the possible incidence of a class *habitus*. However, it is not possible to restrict ourselves to this aspect alone; we must also question the place occupied by these women in the social structure and how their characteristics directly affect the configuration of the course.

In terms of age, 35.2% of the respondents were born after the year 2000; 22% were born in the 1980s; 39.7% were born in the 1990s; and only one (1.47%) was born in the 1970s. That is, 63.2% of the women interviewed are older than 23 — and 39.7% are over 26. It should be noted that, according to the Educational Census, the average age of students in Brazilian higher education is 26, which means that a significant proportion of the students in the pedagogy course at UEMG Barbacena are above the national average. At Barbacena the average age is 27.13 years (Table 2).

**Table 2 – Average age of the students interviewed at the Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais— Barbacena in relation to the national average.**

	Average age (years)
<b>UEMG Barbacena pedagogy students interviewed</b>	27.13
<b>Brazilian higher education students</b>	26

Source: prepared by the authors.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

With regard to color, half of those interviewed say they are white, while 17.6% say they are black, and 32.4% brown. For a significant proportion, their mothers have occupations considered to be technically unskilled in a complex society in terms of the social division of labor,

as 57.3% have mothers classified as “housewives”, “maids”, “cleaning ladies”, “farm workers”, “school cafeteria workers” or “farmers”. There are also “nursing technicians”, “caregivers for the elderly” (with no details about training provided), “primary school teachers”, “security guards” and “hairstylists” (Table 3).

**Table 3 – Color and race among interviewees at Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais —Barbacena.**

	UEMG students interviewed (%)	Brazilian public higher education students (%)	Brazilian private higher education students (%)
<b>Black</b>	17.64	11	7.9
<b>Brown</b>	32.36	36.9	34
<b>White</b>	50	48.8	55

Source: prepared by the author.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

The mothers of 59% of the respondents have only attended or completed primary education, while 28% said their mothers attended or completed secondary education. Only two, or 3%, have mothers who completed higher education, and the same number have completed graduate studies. Four of the mothers, or 6%, have never been to school (Table 4).

**Table 4 – Level of schooling of the mothers of the students of Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais — Barbacena interviewed.**

	Mother’s schooling
<b>Elementary school - complete or incomplete</b>	59
<b>High school - complete or incomplete</b>	28
<b>Higher education - complete</b>	3
<b>Graduate school - complete</b>	3

Source: prepared by the authors.

In light of this data, it should be noted that a considerable proportion of the mothers have jobs related to domestic tasks or, in the same proportions, related to what Biroli refers to as *care* (Biroli, 2018): 39, or 57.3%, are linked to these occupations associated with *care*, including “maids”, “cleaning ladies”, “housewives”, “caregivers for the elderly”, “school cafeteria workers”. This makes evident a kind of conditioning regarding the trades considered to be feminine, which are different from those of men. Women are given responsibility for care, which is not a matter of freedom of choice, but is probably the result of restrictions arising from a social condition that limits the opportunities for action on their horizon. This is the reproduction of a social practice, identified in a class *habitus*, in which oppressed women are found.

Biroli also points out that this “crisis of care” is a portrait of the unequal conditions in which society is organized, which makes it difficult for the most fragile parts of the population to overcome their precariousness.

The ‘crisis of care’ can be thought of [...] as a result of the implementation of the neoliberal agenda of retraction of the state, as well as the conformation of subjectivities in an environment in which competition is established as a value, to the extent that collective and solidarity principles are being undermined. (Biroli, 2018, p. 62)

The most impoverished, the oppressed, faced with the retreat of a state that leaves the social regulation of opportunities to a supposedly promising market, must face the moral conservatism that classifies people by “those who are responsible and those who are irresponsible, or those who are independent and those who are dependent” (Biroli, 2018, p. 63). This certainly weighs heavily on women.

Among the fathers, 44% have jobs that are considered low-skilled, such as “construction workers”, “construction workers’ assistants”, “truck drivers”, “bakers”, “drivers”, “salesmen”, “farmers”, “garbage collectors”, and others. Many were described as retired, with one “electrician”, one “soldier” (second sergeant), one “teacher” and two “mechanics”.

Their fathers’ occupations correspond to their levels of education, as 63.2% of them only attended or completed primary education; 22% attended or completed secondary education; 1.5% have incomplete higher education; while only 4.5% have completed higher education. Another 9.8% are unaware of their father’s education. The data is relevant if we take as a reference studies by Mont’Alvão Neto (2014) on the reduction of inequality for black and brown female working students with parents with limited educational training. In other words, higher education may represent one of the only mechanisms for social ascension for this section of the population, which lacks cultural capital, as understood by Nogueira (2021) (Table 5).

**Table 5 – Level of education of the fathers of the students of Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais —Barbacena interviewed.**

	Father’s education (%)
Elementary school - complete or incomplete	63.2
High school - complete or incomplete	22
Higher education - complete or incomplete	5
Graduate studies - complete	0
Unknown	9.8

Source: prepared by the author.

The distinctions in the professions of fathers and mothers can be noted, even though the majority of cases reveal occupations considered less complex in the productive structure of capitalist society. The gender specificity of certain occupations is evident, with the work of most mothers associated with caring for the home and family, along with barriers to choosing a career path. It would be difficult for the academic life of these students to not be related to this logic.

A closer look at this situation indicates the existence of asymmetries of authority in both professional and domestic life (Bourdieu, 2002). It must be assumed that this asymmetry has a direct impact on the opportunities individuals have to participate in many fields — in fact, following the logic of Bourdieu’s field theory, agents tend to be restricted to their own environment, operating according to its rules, which makes it difficult to approach other fields. Notably, a limitation of possibilities persists.

Choices [...] are not defined in the private or public sphere. The role they play in either modulates their access to important resources, such as time and money, social recognition of their skills and possibilities for more equal participation. (Biroli, 2018, p. 64, italics in the original)

Of the students interviewed, 30.9% said that their family's total income was no more than one minimum wage; 42.65% said their income was between one and two minimum wages; 19.11% said it was between two and four minimum wages; while 4.41% said their family's income was between four and ten minimum wages. It's important to note that 36.7% of the respondents claim that their mothers are housewives, and thus have no financial income, so these households are financially supported only by a man (Table 6).

**Table 6 – Average family income among the students of Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais — Barbacena interviewed.**

Family income	UEMG Pedagogy students interviewed (%)
Up to one minimum wage	30.9
One to two minimum wages	42.65
Two to four minimum wages	19.11
Four to ten minimum wages	4.41

Source: own elaboration.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

On the national scene, 61.9% of young people from class A, with a household income above eight minimum wages, attend higher education, while only 10.5% of those from class E, with an income of less than one minimum wage, have access to higher education (INEP, 2020). This data should be evaluated from the perspective of Moris *et al.* (2022), who predict that school success is directly conditioned by family socialization processes, something attested to by their analysis of Enem scores, especially with regard to mastery of the cultured norm of the Portuguese language, exercised at home, and performance on the exam. In this case, having young students with fathers and mothers who don't have the codifying elements needed to certify their ability in the Portuguese language is, in itself, a major setback in cultural capital.

The information above shows that Barbacena's pedagogy students are usually poorer than the poorest students in higher education in Brazil. This is an indication that UEMG has easier access for a section of the population that has historically been excluded from university. This data needs to be analyzed considering its possible impact on the training of the teachers in question, as well as on the representations they are able to construct and according to the logic of the existence of more and less prestigious careers — and what impact this has on the educational institution as a whole (Table 7).

**Table 7 – Percentage with the lowest income among Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais Barbacena students interviewed in relation to the national average for higher education students.**

	UEMG Barbacena pedagogy students interviewed (%)	Higher education in Brazil (%)
Income of up to one minimum wage	30.9	10.5

Source: prepared by the author.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

Among the respondents, 28% are married or in a relationship; 3% are divorced, while 69% say they are single. In this case, it is assumed that some of the single women may naturally live with their fathers and mothers, thus declaring their parents' income. In all, 78% have no children, while 11.7%

have one child; 4.5% say they have two; another 4.5% have three children; while 1.5% say they have four children. In total, 22% of those interviewed are fathers or mothers — which corresponds with the higher average age presented, particularly considering that 28% declared themselves married — bearing in mind that 63.17% were born in the 1990s, 1980s and 1970s.

According to the students' declarations, 81% attended regular high school, while 8.5% went to a technical school; and 4.5% did both; 6% of students completed their education in a youth and adult education (EJA) program. This last figure is somewhat natural considering the students' average age of 27.13 years. It should also be noted that 91.17% of the women interviewed attended public secondary school, while 7.35% attended a private school, and 1.4% attended both. In Brazil as a whole, in public institutions of higher education, these figures are 60.1 and 39.9%, respectively (INEP, 2020). This difference of Barbacena students from the national averages relates to their family income, which is quite low compared with the national average, explaining the demand for public education (Table 8).

**Table 8 – Percentage of graduates from public and private schools among the students of Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais —Barbacena interviewed compared to national data.**

	UEMG Barbacena pedagogy students interviewed (%)	Undergraduates in public institutions of higher education in Brazil (%)
Public school graduates	91.17	60.1
Private school graduates	7.35	39.9

Source: prepared by the author.

UEMG: Universidade do Estado de Minas Gerais.

The data indicating that the majority attended public secondary schools reinforces the thesis that UEMG Barbacena's pedagogy students are more impoverished, even compared to the national reality, which itself is quite unequal. This fact converges with the information on income, according to which 73.55% live in families that earn no more than two minimum wages.

## CULTURE

Cultural activities outside the home are scarce, if not precarious. This is because in the three months prior to the interview, the majority of the students declared that they had not been to the cinema (69.7%), the theater (87.1%), a dance show (87.9%), music concerts (50%), or gone out dancing (61.7%), been to a museum or art gallery (75.4%), a sports club (83.6%) or watched a soccer match (53.1%).

To make more reliable inferences about this data, the range of cultural services of this type available in the Barbacena region where they live must be considered, as well as the students' income, which would allow them to invest in these activities. Similarly, the older age of the students contributes to the assumption that they are primarily committed to their family, to their home — which are effects of the “care crisis” — more than anything else, suggesting that almost all of their income should go towards domestic commitments, with no room for other activities. Of course, this doesn't mean that the students disregard the importance of cultural activities for their personal and professional development.

Additionally related to the subject of cultural activities, 32.3% of students say that they never read newspapers or magazines, whether digital or printed, at home. Another 24.6% say they do so less than once a week. Among the respondents, 17.5% claim never to read books that are not

related to school, while another 28.6% do so less than once a week; 22.7% of the respondents say they watch movies (including on streaming platforms) less than once a week or never at all; while 77.8% of the students, in their leisure time at home, use smartphone resources five times a week or more.

The latest figures converge with the fact that only 4.5% of respondents say they don't have any social media. The most popular are Instagram, on which 94.1% of the students have registered profiles, and Facebook, with 70.5%. Perhaps this helps to understand the preference for using smartphone resources during leisure time. It is worth noting that 72% of the students do not follow any kind of political profile or page on these networks.

At first glance, it can be concluded that these students have limited means to acquire cultural capital, which definitely influences their academic training. Furthermore, they resort to more accessible tools, such as smartphones and social networks, in their leisure time, without, however, looking for informative content, such as general news about politics.

When asked about their choice of a teaching career, considering the knowledge acquired during their university education, 91.17% of the interviewees said that today, if they had to choose again which career path to follow, they would certainly turn to teaching. Of those interviewed, 83.82% partially or totally agree that "teaching, more than being a profession, represents a mission in humanity". This last statement suggests that the students interviewed consider their career choice to be something special. In this way, they give meaning to their education, embellishing it with an extra specificity — masking the limitation of professional choice attested to by the issue of class.

It is hard not to presume that these circumstances, related to cultural capital, their use of leisure time, and the way they conceive of teaching, are not a reflection of the socio-economic situation of these students, most of whom are women, which needs to be considered in the analysis. It is possible to infer that the notion of "mission" attributed to the teaching career is associated with the idea of responsibility for others, "care", which is acquired and reinforced in the domestic sphere, and which takes on a new guise in the public sphere, revealing its complementarity with the private sphere.

This is reinforced by the fact that 57.3% of the interviewees agreed with the phrase: "It is the teacher's mission to confront all the difficulties in order to play their role in education and the transformation of Brazil". This statement implies that teachers believe it is their responsibility to withstand any and all obstacles to teaching, reinforcing the evidence that they conceive of the profession as a mission. In addition, 94% believe that teachers and students should be friends at school, reinforcing the principle of greater closeness, in a direction that goes beyond a logic restricted to the normative level of teaching and learning.

Still from this perspective, 89.7% agree that "learning should be enjoyable and the educator's role is to create opportunities and a favorable climate for students to learn" — a role that would fall to the institution itself. And 75% believe that "the learning process has to be based on the idea of comfort and care". In this case, there is a clear inclination towards the premise of the "crisis of care", critically announced by Biroli (2018) when he highlights the existence of an idea of the place occupied by women that is the result of unequal conditions and that simultaneously reinforces this condition, showing itself to be conservative, although it may sound progressive.

Taking Freire as their guides, in an education involving comfort and care, the pedagogy students are guided by the premise of objectification of the student, because it removes the reflective opportunity specific to the emancipatory role of education. It is as if the pedagogy students are sustained by the perspective of tutelage, but a tutelage carried out by someone who doesn't abandon their condition of being oppressed — in fact, this is almost an outsourced oppression at the behest of the oppressor, carried out by those who are oppressed who, in this act, reproduce (Bourdieu, 1982) and reinforce (Freire, 1987) their condition.

It is also worth noting that 55.9% of the pedagogy students interviewed believe that the recent campaign known as “‘school without a political party’ helps students to have a more reflective and less doctrinaire education”. A further 42.6%, when asked to indicate which political spectrum they were on (extreme left, left, center, right or extreme right), said they didn’t know or didn’t want to answer. It is also noteworthy that 59% say they avoid talking about their candidate with friends and family, declining a political approach in the public sphere.

This piece of data cannot be seen in isolation, but must be aligned with those presented on the probable lack of searching by the pedagogy students for social and political information, and their lack of access to other cultural elements. This inevitably interferes in the composition of their cultural capital and, in turn, in their education to become teachers. It is also interesting to note that 86.7% of the women interviewed agree that gender should be discussed at school. However, the understanding they have of this issue remains to be seen, as well as the tone they would give to this debate, or how they would like the discussions to take place. For instance, 40% say they oppose legalizing abortion, an issue that is very dear to those who support gender studies, just to cite one example. This is a concern that Castro and Ferrari (2021) noticed when working with the impressions of gender images among pedagogy students at another Brazilian public university.

In absolute numbers, the students generally show a certainty about their professional choice, reinforced by a sense of commitment to teaching for a universal reality, taking it as a true mission. On the other hand, the data from the survey indicate that this is a precocious certainty given that their ability to produce such an understanding is questionable in view of their precarious access to information, cultural capital in Bourdieu’s sense, and exposure to a variety of realities. So where do these certainties come from? What is produced in their social environment, inside their homes, that makes them confident about their choices, about the way they view the profession they are adopting? The answers to these questions must necessarily consider the visible financial limitations and the consequent austerity of their social life, as basic elements in the production of meaning for these students. It is too early to say, but perhaps this answer is an indication of the social practices of a social category with a precarious life that is seeking higher self-esteem, as suggested in studies by Jessé Souza (2009).

It is remarkable that there is a relationship between their living conditions and the way they conceive their own lives and, consequently, the professional career they will follow, as well as the format acquired by this career in their imaginary. The pedagogy students at UEMG Barbacena — who perhaps represent a microcosm of pedagogy students in Brazil as a whole — are oppressed in the Freirean sense of the term. Reproducing a class *habitus*, they encounter limitations along the way that decisively create the circumstances that condition them to becoming pedagogy students, restricting their access to more prestigious courses, and even limiting their understanding of the factors of social conditioning resulting from their position as women in society.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Based on the survey data, and comparing it with information from the Educational Census, it can be said that the pedagogy students at UEMG Barbacena are the most impoverished among the poorest Brazilian students. The thesis of the search for social ascension helps to explain their demand for this education. However, when compared with studies that indicate a devaluation of the teaching profession and its current lack of attractiveness, it does not explain the reason for the large increase in enrollment rates. Thus, this article points to the need for studies to help understand why pedagogy is still attractive to those seeking higher education today.

The data presented in this article is preliminary yet it was decided to disseminate them immediately, to allow an initial correlation restricted to socio-economic and some cultural



characteristics. However, using the conceptual principles referenced here, we can reach some conclusions that shed light on students in higher education, especially with regard to undergraduate pedagogy students at the State University of Minas Gerais.

The first relates to the social position of these students. Their presence at the bottom of the Brazilian pyramid of inequality is clear. And compared with the national reality, the undergraduates in this study are certainly poorer than the national average. In theory, this poverty inhibits their access to a wide range of cultural goods, influencing the development of their sense of meaning in relation to the Brazilian reality and, consequently, their understanding of the teaching profession. Their professional expectations may also be affected by these circumstances, but a more reliable analysis certainly depends on processing more data from the questionnaire applied in this survey.

Following the assumption of class *habitus*, it can be said that it offers a pertinent tool for evaluating these students. A need thus remains to follow this guideline to develop a more robust analysis, to reach the basic precepts of the conception of education and teaching practice held by UEMG pedagogy undergraduates. How does this influence their view of education? How is the precariousness of life a determining factor in their understanding of what a teacher should be? What consequences does this have for the job market? More solid answers to these questions would only be possible by continuing this research.

Another point to consider is career choice. The data presented here corroborates previous research that indicates that the choice of career path is conditioned by an individual's social position. In this case, since the majority of the students are very poor, a degree in pedagogy is the option "left to them" to attain minimal social advancement.

It is understood that the pedagogy students at UEMG fit into Paulo Freire's logic of the oppressed, which is quite strong in the Brazilian reality. This article insinuates that simple access to higher education is not sufficient for overcoming the oppressive condition, given the permanence of a class *habitus*. In fact, we should even question whether, in the way it is exercised, it does not reinforce this oppressive tendency, further sinking the position of the oppressed, now with institutional approval. Therefore, from a pedagogy of the oppressed — with *pedagogy* understood here as a systematic practice, according to the original conception — there is now a pedagogy for the oppressed — in this case, *pedagogy* is a pure and simple noun, as it refers specifically to the modality of university teacher certification.

The objective of this article was never to address this issue completely. On the contrary, the idea is to clearly indicate that more extensive research in this area should be conducted, given its importance and social impact. A start has been made and work will continue from this basis.

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