

Training of early childhood teachers and the conception of democratic education: the Pró-Saber experience¹

Formação de professores de educação infantil e a concepção de educação democrática: a experiência do Pró-Saber^{2,3}

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Abstract: This article investigates the experience of the *Curso Normal Superior* (Higher Normal Course) of the *Instituto Superior de Educação Pró-Saber*, located in Rio de Janeiro. The objective was to analyze a proposal for early childhood teachers' training which is based on Paulo Freire's democratic conception of education and has as guiding principles the in-service and cultural training. This is a case study, which used observation, interview and questionnaire as methodological tools and sought the support of authors who develop studies in the area. The data showed that a training that prioritizes the process of authorship, the collective construction of knowledge and the opportunity to access different cultural expressions in a reflective perspective contributes to teachers to take ownership of their own practice and to feel safer, valued and committed to education as a broader political project.

Keywords: early childhood education, teacher training, *Pró-Saber*, democratic conception of education

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Resumo:

Este artigo traz como objeto de investigação a experiência do Curso Normal Superior do Instituto Superior de Educação Pró-Saber, localizado no Rio de Janeiro. O objetivo foi analisar uma proposta de formação de professores de educação infantil que apresenta algumas particularidades: é baseada na concepção democrática de educação de Paulo Freire e toma como eixos norteadores a formação em serviço e a formação cultural. Trata-se de um estudo de caso, que fez uso de observação, entrevista e questionário como ferramentas metodológicas e buscou respaldo de autores que desenvolvem pesquisas na área. Os dados demonstraram que uma formação que prioriza o processo de autoria, a construção coletiva do conhecimento e a oportunidade de acesso a diferentes expressões culturais em uma perspectiva reflexiva contribui para que os professores se apropriem da própria prática, sintam-se mais seguros, valorizados e comprometidos com a educação enquanto projeto político mais amplo.

Palavras-chave: *educação infantil, formação de professores, Pró-Saber, concepção democrática de educação*

Introduction

This article results from a survey conducted between 2015 and 2016 on the training of early childhood teachers. Although the theme of teacher training has been recurrent in academic studies in recent decades, the demands for better qualification in this area have intensified the need to rethink the early training model, prompting researchers to seek new perspectives. The contribution of other areas of knowledge, such as philosophy, anthropology and sociology, contributed to placing the teachers in a historical, cultural and social context that dialogues with and partly determines their place in the world and in the profession. “Paulo Freire’s contribution in this regard was unbeatable. The author stressed how much the teacher is a being of the world and cannot be thought outside this perspective” (Cunha, 2013, p. 614). With regard to early childhood education, after intense debate and as a result of many struggles, especially from the 1980s, Brazil has achieved a consistent and updated legislation, focused on this segment and on the professional who works in it. As Kramer emphasizes, (2005, p. 134) “... in legal terms, we can state that Brazil has never had such a modern legislation regarding childhood.” But how has this theoretical breakthrough impacted current training models? To what extent does the current

discourse, which brings a conception of children as social subjects with culture, knowledge and identity, reach the theoretical spaces of training?

Despite the numerous investigations that have been carried out on childhood, there is no evidence of effective changes in the organization of institutions that serve young children (Nunes, Corsino, & Kramer, 2011). Studies indicate that teachers generally continue to arrive to classrooms often feeling unprepared, insecure, and thus reproduce the mechanical practices and relationships of authority and domination they have undergone in their student experience (Nunes, Corsino, Kramer, 2011; Micarello, 2006). Investigations have also evidenced the division between theory and practice as one of the main factors to maintain this sense of unpreparedness, especially regarding the low utilization of the teachers' experiential knowledge during early training.

In order to know a proposal of training based on the democratic conception of education, which supposes that teachers assume a role of co-author in their training process, the experience of the Normal Higher Course (CNS – *Curso Normal Superior*) of the *Instituto Superior de Educação Pró-Saber* (ISEPS), located in the south region of Rio de Janeiro, was chosen as the object of investigation. This investigation, with qualitative approach, was a case study translated into analytical description, a result of the comings and goings from the field to theoretical reflections. The choice for the Pró-Saber course was based on the fact that it has some particularities that make this experience unique: (i) the institution chose to offer only the qualification of teacher training for early childhood education; (ii) the teacher training is done in service, and students must perform in early childhood institutions, public or affiliated, as a prerequisite; (iii) the methodology is based on Paulo Freire's democratic conception of education, and one of the principles that guides this conception is the awareness of the professional's own practice; (iv) art and aesthetics have a structuring bias in the pedagogical proposal, which prioritizes a cultural training.

To answer the questions that guided the investigation, this study sought, at first, to understand the theoretical and methodological bases of the CNS and its operation. Does this model of initial training provide early childhood professionals with conditions to act in line with the conceptions of child and work at this stage of schooling produced by educational studies in recent decades? What principles guide the study? What are the specificities of the methodology adopted by the institution? Subsequently, the study sought to know the results that the course

had produced in the lives of students who had passed through there. How did the graduates understand the methodology used? What changes had the training provided in the professional and personal aspects?

The methodological resources used for the research consisted of reading legal and internal documents, conducting semi-structured interviews, observing classes and applying a questionnaire to the graduates. The exploratory reading of the internal documents aimed to gather data on the operation, the administrative structure, the rules, but also the philosophical and theoretical foundation that governs the institution's work. Seeking to hear the subjects involved in this training process, interviews were conducted with graduates, professors, coordinators and deans of the course⁴. The interviews with the graduates aimed to identify what they could benefit from the experience of training in teaching practice; with the pedagogical team, the interviews expanded the data analysis and allowed researchers to understand aspects about methodology, class organization, selection process, among others.

For greater consistency to the information collected and to enable triangulation of data, an online questionnaire was created and sent to the former students. The anonymity of respondents was maintained in order to encourage people to freely express themselves. The rate of return was 36.5%. Despite the expectation of a higher return, the investigation considered the answers obtained, as they pointed trends and expressed important points of view to ratify or relativize data produced by other methodological instruments. The observation aimed to verify how the methodology described in the interviews and internal documents happened in the classroom.

Throughout the article, Pró-Saber and its methodology are presented in an interlocution with the authors that supported the study. At the end, some findings are highlighted to offer possible contributions to the theme about the training of early childhood teachers.

⁴ The names of the professors and students presented in this paper are fictitious.

The *Pró-Saber* Institute and the Higher Normal Course: *that place is blessed!*

The *Pró-Saber* facility is in Humaitá, a neighborhood in the south of Rio de Janeiro. There are no signs, just a white wall, a discreet gate, and a hard-to-find doorbell. In contrast to this narrow outer appearance, once the gate has been opened, one discovers a space in which it is difficult to remain indifferent.

The feeling of being “at home” and the welcoming role that the space organization plays were, in different ways, manifested by several interviewees. Most of the furniture is typically residential, reminiscent of the previous house, with wooden tables, sideboards and cabinets. The organization of furniture and decoration create an environment favorable to meetings and exchanges, conversations and get-togethers (Photos 1 and 2).



Photo 1 – Library



Photo 2 – Covered living area

The institution was founded in 1987 as *Centro de Estudos e Atendimentos Psicopedagógicos Pró-Saber* (Pró-Saber Psychopedagogical Studies and Care Center), and functions as a psychopedagogical clinic to the present day. Pró-Saber was accredited as a higher education institution in 2004 and started to offer a degree in teaching in early childhood education. The first CNS class was formed in 2005, and since then 136 students in five classes have graduated. The current teaching staff has 16 professors, nine permanent and seven hourly. Classes are held from Monday through Friday, from 7 pm to 10 pm, and on Saturday mornings, biweekly.

The democratic conception of education translated in the methodological instruments of Madalena Freire⁵, pedagogical coordinator of the course, in dialogue with psychopedagogy, marks the theoretical and philosophical framework on which the work is based, and, in a way, can be summarized in the following statement by Paulo Freire (2014, p. 95): “Nobody educates anybody else, nobody educates your own self. People educate among themselves, mediated by the world.” For the author, the democratic conception of education demands from teaching:

- Methodical rigorousness – otherwise there is no real learning nor real transformation of the subject. Without it, there is no ability to intervene in the world;
- Research – it is not an extra quality in the teacher, but an inherent quality in teaching;
- Respect the knowledge of students;
- Ethics and aesthetics – decency and beauty holding hands;
- Embodiment of words by example;
- Critical and continuous reflection on the practice;
- Recognition and assumption of cultural identity – perhaps one of the most important tasks of educational practice is to lead students to assume themselves as social and historical beings in their transformative role.

The educator regrets the neglect of the feelings, the affection and even the materiality of the space, that is, everything that speaks to the student, but that is not curricular content. Freire (2004) considers that listening, so important in the relationship between educator and student, happens when teachers talk to their students as listening subjects and not as the object

⁵ Madalena Freire is an art educator and pedagogue. Since 1981 she has been dedicated to teacher training, especially early childhood education.

of their speech. To learn listening according to the democratic conception, the teacher needs a training that addresses the qualities necessary for such a posture, which is constituted in practice. Freire highlights some of these virtues, such as lovingness, respect for differences, tolerance, humility, willingness to change, identification with hope and justice.

In this sense, the affective dimension was repeatedly pointed out by the interviewed students as a differential between the Pró-Saber course and their previous academic experiences. Students begin by feeling welcomed by the physical space.

As tired as I was, as complicated as the day was, being there was always great, because it was as if the negative energies were all left out. The space, the atmosphere, the staff there, always very nice. (Viviane – graduate)

Respondents often mentioned the feeling of being at home, of not wanting to leave; this can be explained by the intentionality of building an alive space, permeated by relationships. Certainly “aesthetics are important, but, above all, there must be people who give soul to space. When permeated by humanizing relationships, the space is made a home” (Cosmo, 2013, p. 98).

The student’s recognition as a social and historical being was translated into the perception of welcoming expressed by the graduates, and the sense of having an identity there. The interviewees associated a human training with the fact of being recognized in their uniqueness, being looked at, heard, embraced, feeling respected.

We don’t find it anywhere, to treat the human, look eye to eye, meet the student by name, go to his school. And here they appreciate the eye to eye, the name of each one, the story which each brings in the baggage, it makes you exchange more with the other, and in that we grow. (Helena – observer and graduate)

We are human and treated as individuals without any prejudice; on the contrary, we’re esteemed and provoked to move forward and believe that we are capable. (Questionnaire)

The reports also indicate that, besides being welcomed, each one feels challenged to move forward, to overcome their own limits, through listening and exchange. For Freire (2004), sensitivity, goodwill and joy are part of teaching and are not opposed to rigor and authority, not even to the scientific training and technical knowledge necessary for teaching. This recognition contributes to raising self-esteem and the feeling of professional appreciation. The warmth and

welcoming that the students report finding in the course are in line with the author's ideas, for whom education cannot be a cold and soulless experience, alienated from feelings, emotions, desires and dreams.

This philosophical basis is translated into the political-pedagogical project of the course, organized so that activities develop methodological rigor, critical reflection on the practice (both students and teachers), in an ethical and aesthetic way. The daily life of CNS-ISEPS students shows that limits, discipline and intense study are not characteristic of an authoritarian education, but necessary for the preservation of freedom (Freire, 2008).

Class structure and methodological instruments

One of the particularities that aroused the desire to deepen the investigation concerns the methodological resources used in training. To materialize the conception of democratic education, the classes take their own course. Through collective reflective work, which consists of a spiral of observation, recording, reflection, evaluation and planning, the theory is grasped in the doing and its problematization among peers. The goal is that students produce, throughout the course, a knowledge resulting from theory in practice, linked to a project of critical transformation.

The class begins with professors *presenting the agenda* of activities scheduled for that day and then calling the *roll*. This is seen as a pedagogical device that aims to highlight not only those attending the class but also those absent from it. In addition, the roll can serve to introduce the theme or to call the presence to the actual class. One of the interviewed professors states that another purpose of the roll is to be aware of the group that is present: "After you form a group, they are all crucial pieces in a knowledge-building puzzle" (Professor Cristiana).

According to the professor, the constitution of the group requires careful observation and monitoring of professors, who are concerned with stimulating in students the development or expression of the qualities necessary for professional practice and life, using the interactions of the group itself. In Freire's conception of reading, the world is a space to be "read" and, therefore, the pedagogical environment constitutes a text to be interpreted by the teacher.

Silences, smiles, facial expressions and body language make up this text, which the teacher needs to learn to read.

Resuming the structure of the class, after presenting the activities scheduled for the day and the roll, the professor proposes what are called *observation points* – focus of attention that direct the immediate records to be made by students throughout the class. Such focuses fall into three aspects: (i) the learning itself; (ii) the class dynamics; (iii) the coordination of the class by the professor. All students have to observe and take records of their own learning, but in each class one student is asked to observe the dynamics, i.e. how the group responded to the proposed content and activities, and another student is asked to note aspects related to the professor's conduct of the class. These records are read at the end of the class and serve as assessment for professors, helping them to adjust their planning.

In addition to the students' records, there is an observer who is part of the course teaching staff and is considered a co-author of the class. The observer's function, according to Madalena Freire in an interview, is to illuminate what the professor does not see. The observer also makes a brief record of the class, with emphasis on aspects that the professor may have requested, and hands him/her the record at the end, contributing to the professor's evaluation and planning process. For Ostetto (2012, p. 22), observing a pedagogical situation requires an "open, sensitive and welcoming" look, and the exercise of writing can contribute to modify the way one looks at children. The author recalls that our look, in general, is more focused on the lack and search for a pattern of behavior marked by body control. The exercise of observation during the training can contribute to modify this standard.

Another component of the class, *aesthetic nutrition*, is aligned with a cultural approach and the development of an aesthetic look. This pedagogical device is presented by Professor Cristiana as

... a way of bringing inspiration from the field of art to the class. Something that may be directly related with the content or not. It may serve to provoke contemplation, to provoke an emotion, anyway, something that you want to share from the field of art with people. So, aesthetic nutrition works as an inspiration for the whole course I'll take in class.

To perform this moment of the class the professor can use resources such as movies, music, poetry, among others, encouraging the group to express themselves about what was incited in each one from the material presented. Subsequently, content activities – which may vary in form – are developed and, at the end, the records on the observation points are read. This moment is extremely important in the methodology, because, according to interviews with the pedagogical team, it, among other functions, leads students to understand how the knowledge is constructed collectively, the singularities in the way of learning and the exercise of empathy and cooperation for group growth in a harmonious way.

The immediate records made by students during the class, from the observation points, become material for writing a reflexive synthesis as homework. The challenge of this exercise was mentioned several times by the interviewed students due to the amount of syntheses required, but also because the writing organizes ideas that are often loose, without the individual realizing it, as can be seen in the following interview excerpt:

To make a record every day was surprising. I am the result of a traditional education. I had a hard time writing. Even in constructing the thought. I think a lot before I speak and it was the same thing when I had to write. For me, the subjects in which I had to write more were very difficult and this writing exercise for me was crucial, even to pass the official test to work for the city. (Daniel – graduate)

Daniel's speech echoes Ostetto's (2012) question about the difficulty presented by professors in this writing exercise. Would this difficulty be a result from the lack of incentive in our school life to use writing as a space for authorship and reflection? The author states that writing is an exercise that requires effort, discipline and courage to face one's own difficulties. The records receive the status of a central spring which speeds up reflective thinking.

The learning of the record is the most powerful instrument in the construction of the educator's pedagogical and political awareness, because when we record something, we try to keep, hold fragments of the significantly lived time, to keep them alive as a record of part of our history, our memory. (Genescá & Cid, 2013, p. 75)

For the reflexive synthesis to fulfill such a crucial role, the text is written in narrative form – an artisanal communication, therefore unique. The narrative record enables professors to include themselves in the text with their subjectivities, impasses and conflicts, taking their records to the field of possibilities, since they aim to rethink their practices. The narratives articulate everyday life with reflective work.

In a way, the lessons recorded cease to be a private event to become a shared experience: author, characters and interlocutors find in the text a point for dialogue and elaboration of reflections about their own experiences. Thus, narration is not an individual commitment, but an ethically-oriented commitment to the world. (Ferreira, Prado, & Aragão, 2015, p. 213)

The authors consider that personal reflections are socially produced; therefore, they carry the collective and return to it in a gesture of sharing. The school can be, in fact, a privileged space to exercise the authorial writing and collaborative practices so necessary for the construction of citizen autonomy and freedom. It was then sought to understand, with the aid of interviews, what these records consisted of, how often they occurred and how students perceived the effects of this writing.

... when you make a record, you are studying too, you are reviewing things that happened during the class and that you are reflecting on, and it is important. Because when you register and read to other friends during class, this is also a way for everyone to participate in your thinking, whether you accept it or not, but it is a way to socialize what you are thinking. It also makes not only you grow, but everyone around you. (Lara, undergraduate)

... I believe that this thinking of the reflection is the great differential. It's from the reflection, from the record, that you realize the process, whether the learning process as a whole, or your own process. (Philip, observer)

The statements presented demonstrate that the exercise of reflexive recording is a way of appropriating knowledge and sharing with peers. These syntheses seem to be characterized by a resumption of the lived experience with the necessary distance to understand the situations in another way and to perceive different ways of acting. To revisit settled certainties and break the old to welcome the new. The study conducted by Ferreira, Prado & Aragão (2015, p. 210) indicated that the record of lived and narrated experiences “can change professors’ perceptions about their daily work and allow the production, appropriation and circulation of new educational knowledge.”

The narrative is, therefore, an exercise of the historical-social subjects, who express themselves in the choice of what to narrate and what to silence. On conversations with the class during the study, the issue of writing throughout the course was addressed. The answers showed that writing is valued from the beginning. The syntheses are kept as study material, as they include the articulation with the practice itself, the possibilities of taking the studied theory to the everyday life and the contributions of the professor.

The virtuous cycle of the methodology is then set in a spiral, where directed observation and reflection on what has been observed form the basis for evaluation and planning of both professor and student.

A theory of personality within the theory of professionalism⁶

Much has been said about the impossibility of separating the personal and professional dimensions and the idea that what we are crosses what we teach. As training is a subjective process, Cunha (2013, p. 619) recognizes that "... this experience includes the life trajectories, the cultural referents and the social values in an amalgam of possibilities of construction of the teaching professionalism, being understood as the profession in action."

Given the difficulty that professors often find in identifying their professional knowledge and their origin, the word *amalgam* seems to be a key. In the *Portuguese Online Dictionary* (2018), amalgam means "Mixture; perfect fusion of distinct things or people that form a whole: it is synonymous with fusion, alloy, mixture." The training process has as one of its functions to bring to consciousness the composition of the "alloy" itself, and everyone has their own. One of the elements of this fusion (of beliefs, values, experiences) is the representation that future professors bring from their experience as a student. Studies have concluded that teachers, when facing a class of students, tend to act on such representations and that "... this knowledge inherited from previous school experience is so strong, that it persists over time and that university education cannot transform it, much less shake it" (Tardif, 2012, p. 20).

⁶ Expression used by Nóvoa (2009, p. 22): "It is about building a personal knowledge (a self-knowledge) within the professional knowledge and capturing the meaning of a profession that does not fit only in a technical or scientific matrix."

The author states that teachers are workers who remain immersed in their workspace for approximately 16 years, as students. The result of this immersion is manifested in the set of certainties, representations and beliefs about school and teaching with which they reach the field: “And when they start working as teachers, it is mainly these beliefs that they reactivate to solve their professional problems” (Tardif, 2012, p. 261).

Since it is difficult to identify the components of an amalgam, one can infer that, regarding the professional’s knowledge, such an alloy has a level of complexity full of possibilities, being unfolded into the need for a self-reflection work during the training, according to Nóvoa (2009). The work to which the author refers aims to show (and, eventually change) the social and affective cognitive filters – derived from life stories and the school career – that will have a predominance in practice when teachers enter the profession.

In this sense, the CNS-ISEPS is structured around three axes, which complement and intercommunicate each other over the course’s three years: *rescue*, *deepening* and *resignification*. The first year is devoted precisely to the reflective work of rescuing life history, especially the student/teacher’s school memories. During the investigation, this dive into one’s subjectivity was described as indispensable for the resignification of the experiences lived by students, providing self-knowledge and personal and professional empowerment. The rescue work that students go through seems to contribute to identifying authoritarian and adult-centered patterns⁷ in their practice of which they were unaware.

One of the classes that shocked me the most was about the Magdalene drawing. She asked us to make a drawing that we remember making in our childhood and I think 90% of the class made the same drawing. (Rafaela – current student)

The situation described by the student left marks precisely because it unveiled what seemed natural, making her aware of the alienating process she had gone through and that she repeated with her students until then. To learn to look at others beyond the apparent, one must be able to see oneself.

⁷ The term “adult-centered” has been used by researchers from different fields of knowledge to designate, in analogy with ethnocentrism, an approach to childhood and the social and cultural world from the adult’s point of view (Kramer, 2005, p. 129).

The rescue axis, characteristic of the first year of the course, contributes not only to the awareness of patterns that the teacher brings in his/her baggage, but also to a sense of welcoming, an aspect unanimously mentioned in the interviews and the questionnaire.

Pró-Saber does not only train you in the academic field, it also trains you as a human being, it listens to you. And it helps to clarify what is inside you still keeping you from growing. What is the school place that wants to hear you? Knowledge alone is not enough for humans to evolve. Because here there are times when they will welcome your soul. (Lara – graduate)

Memory has not only the function of evoking the past, but of placing the present in a critical perspective. According to Kramer (2007), it is the remembrance that allows breaking the human's automaton condition, and it is in language that lies the power of remembrance of history. Through it the history in the present is woven. Students/teachers' memories are shared through oral narratives and written in the classroom. This archaeology of memory also contributes to exercise empathy and tolerance for differences, and can only happen in an environment where the subject feels free and welcomed. "It is this memory that consolidates the historical, political and pedagogical awareness of this subject" (Freire, 2008, p. 410). This intersection of time breaks with the belief of an unchanging destiny before an equally unchanging past.

The child and the everyday life in early childhood education: today I build the class together with children

The *Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Educação Infantil* (Brazilian National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education), established on December 17, 2009, by Resolution No. 5 of the *Câmara de Educação Básica* of the *Conselho Nacional de Educação* (CNE/CEB – Basic Education Board of the National Education Council), are a document with the purpose of guiding early childhood education institutions on the organization and development of their political-pedagogical project and the elaboration of public policies for teacher training. The pedagogical practices of this stage, as stated in article 9 of the Resolution, must be based on experiences and have interactions and games as guiding work axes. The strategies for learning, according to the document, are the different languages, such as plastic arts, poetry, music, theater, photography, communication technologies, among others.

In line with the document, Tiriba, Barbosa, & Santos (2013) advocate the need to establish among children, and between children and adults, quality interactions that enable a humanizing practice. The authors define humanizing practice as that which institutes a creative and loving everyday life that legitimizes the participation of children. This practice demands a teacher who is responsible and aware that the production of a routine of authoritarianism or freedom depends on the organization of these spaces and times. To consider this perspective is to carefully prepare spaces and routines that ensure respect for the children's pace, interest and inventiveness. This stance means breaking with the established, that is, with adult-centered practices in which the children's desires and points of view are not considered, but rather the submission and application of rules and contents pre-established by adults, in a vertical relationship.

Seeking to understand whether the passage through the course had produced changes in the everyday life with children, the students were asked if they noticed any difference in their work before and after the course. Respect was a word constantly mentioned in the interviewees' statements and also in the questionnaire answers – respect for the child's culture, for the pace of each one and for their limits.

Today I see the various possibilities of the children as well as to what extent you should let them try and do. (Rafaela – current student)

Before I had a traditional stance. My look at children is different now, I hear them, I look at the children with a more sensitive look, paying attention to what they need to be stimulated, to be encouraged... when the children arrive at the daycare, each one brings a baggage inside and we have to take into consideration this baggage that the child brings, their experiences, their culture. (Jade – current student)

The statements indicate that children are seen as unique in their uniqueness and that they need to be considered as an active subject of their development. Rigid practices and a routine that disregards children's interest and curiosity eventually make it mute and invisible. For the child's discourse as a producer of culture, citizen of rights, protagonist of the learning process to be a reality, there must be a teacher who is responsible for mediating knowledge and creating quality interactions, attentive to children's initiatives and as curious as they are. One of the interviewees describes the principle of authoring, which is developed throughout the training:

... the child as a product and producer of culture, as one who can, who has the possibility not for the lack, but one who constantly builds and is built by culture as well. They always focused on production. It has to be from the child. So in a conception of democratic education the teacher will not be able to take the hands of the children and sit them there so they finish their work. (Daniel – graduate)

The sociocultural approach adopted by the professors of the investigated institution contributes to the teachers to situate children in their context, to be interested in their story, respecting their limitations and stimulating their potentialities. The interviews and observations showed that Pró-Saber professors understand early childhood education as a space to live experiences through games and interactions, with respect to the children's pace and production, but especially as a place to be happy.

If preschool has the challenge of resisting a schooling perspective, the daycare center still has a strong mark of social care function. One of the students reports that she was surprised by the possibilities of working with babies and that exercising a sensible and open-minded observation throughout the course has helped her realize the latent potential of the children in her nursery class.

One thing that I've always wondered was how to do it with the nursery kids. We perceive that it is possible, that there are possibilities and loopholes, the kids give us the clues; and then that's when you need to have this very accurate look, which we develop through aesthetic nutrition, observations. A focused and more open observation makes you more sensitive and aware of the child's movements and interests. (Rafaela – current student)

Guimarães (2009, p. 105) indicates the look as a reference in interactions with babies. "The dive into the possibilities of things and the calling of the world is lead and made possible by the look, which often goes from the object to the adult and from the adult to the object as the child is moving towards the new".

Another aspect mentioned in the interviews with the graduates was the fact that they had become more aware of the importance of their work and consequently of the responsibility they carry. Respondents reaffirmed their commitment to the marks they know they will leave in the lives of young citizens, aware that their work affects the children for life, not just during the school year spent with them.

Perhaps as a result of the feeling of being welcomed that they declared to have been so remarkable, most of the graduates manifested a change in the understanding of childhood and the way of looking toward children, assuming a more responsible, respectful and loving look.

Cultural training, the baseline mark of the course, was also pointed out as one of the major contributions to this change.

And this I learned there, the issue of valuing the culture that each child brings from home. I think that is what they wanted us to understand; they dealt with us in the same way we would have to deal with students, with what they bring from home. (Marcia – graduate)

Cultural training: I did not know that Picasso had been inspired by African masks!

Cultural training has been proposed as a crucial way to help the teacher build an everyday life marked by sensitive welcoming, listening, creativity and respect for diversity. Kramer (2005) indicates this training in a humanizing perspective, "... that can favor experiences with art, literature, music, cinema, theater, painting, museums, libraries and is capable of humanizing and making us understand the meaning of life beyond the didactic dimension of the everyday life" (Kramer, 2005, p. 223).

If we understand the role of the teacher not as a mere transmitter of content, but as a mediator of cultures, his/her training must offer opportunities for this professional to be a producer of culture at the same time as he/she is produced in it, critically and reflexively. We live in a multicultural world, and the differences, instead of being seen as enriching, have become barriers in the human coexistence (Carvalho, 2001). Democracy and citizenship are built in the space of the school, in living with differences. The contact – or coexistence – with the accumulated culture throughout human history raises reflections on the meaning of life and our role in society, enabling the strengthening of human relations (Kramer, 1998).

It is important to highlight the place from which the cultural training is addressed in this study. For Carvalho (2016), the concept of culture may indicate what identifies a social group or individual, therefore, "... it seems to be a good instrument to understand the differences between humans and societies", since humans are beings of culture (Carvalho, 2016, p. 23). From the author's perspective, although culture had been used as an instrument of social stratification – especially in the 20th century, when there was a marked separation between elite and popular culture –, this hierarchical concept has been problematized. Globalized culture has

brought some permeability between the so-called high-culture and mass-culture worlds. If then the tradition and the arts were seen as a source of cultural legitimacy, now the phenomenon of audience circulation and an eclectic cultural consumption shows that these instances are diluted in hybridism. Contemporary authors understand that one can no longer speak of a single legitimate culture and argue for a “plural coexistence of cultural manifestations” (Carvalho, 2016, p. 31). Based on these assumptions, the data produced in the field work were analyzed.

As mentioned earlier, the CNS-ISEPS cultural approach assumes a central role in both the pedagogical proposal as for students. Because of this centrality, one of the questions that guided the investigation was: how could a course for training early childhood teachers approach art without an instrumentalizing or hierarchical feature? Pró-Saber understands art and cultural manifestations as a human right, constituent of the subject, which, according to Madalena Freire (2008), is sensitive, aesthetic and in constant search for the beautiful. The concern with providing contact with art and cultural manifestations crosses the institution and the course in different ways and confers a mark, a clear position in relation to the importance attached to the development of a sensitive look. The aesthetic care with the physical space, the aesthetic nutrition as a pedagogical device in classes and a discipline called Cultural Literacy show the relevance of this aspect in the institution’s political-pedagogical project. Professor Marília highlights that the concept of literacy on which they are based, despite the controversy surrounding the expression, is from Paulo Freire, according to which we are eternal learners and we are under training during all our lives.

The Cultural Literacy discipline was unanimously perceived by students and former students of the course as indispensable, not only for professional life, but for human training, reiterating the ideas defended by theorists who support studies in this field (Carvalho, 2001, 2016; Ostetto, 2012; Kramer, 1998, 2005, among others). The course is offered throughout the six semesters of the course, biweekly, and part of the program is accomplished by attending various cultural events, such as cinema, theater, museums. The proposed activities aim at:

... providing an immersion in the different artistic languages, broadening the insertion in the cultural public space, provoking strangeness in relation to consolidated knowledge, arousing the desire to know more about the ways that adults and children have to express themselves in the world and about the world, intertwining individual memory with collective memory and History, problematizing the concept of culture and the conceptions of art and culture present in institutions of cultural environments, critically analyzing cultural productions aimed at children, discovering and planning ways to expand the experience of children with different cultural manifestations. (Genescá & Cid, 2013, p. 29)

Seeking to understand the presence of a discipline with specific focus on cultural training, interviews with the pedagogical team addressed the function of such discipline and the way the activities are carried out. Professor Cristiana explained that “art is valued for what it provokes, it makes people see themselves, makes them recognize aspects that we often do not realize rationally.” In the search for a humanized training, pointed out by the founder of the institution in interview, the aesthetic education enables one to go beyond the cognitive dimension and intellectual work, mobilizing the subject’s perception and senses.

In the interview, the Cultural Literacy professor explained that, in a training process, the proposal is that these outputs have a reflective feature; thus, before external activities there is a contextualization.

... there was a prior preparation. We are going to watch Deborah Colker. Why? Who’s that? ... Then we had an entire specific class about her, presenting the unique steps that are from her choreography only. And when we went to the Municipal Theater, a person who sang opera 50 years ago told the whole story of the theater, as it was then. (Teresa – graduate)

It was wonderful! You didn’t just go for cultural field trips, you did a pre-work in the classroom. The professor brought for example Monet. We talked about Monet, what we knew about him and then went to the exhibition. So that was how it worked: you related theory to practice, which were the cultural field trips. (Lara – graduate)

Lara and Teresa describe the preparatory work that was done before cultural field trips with the aim of “helping them to look” and not in a sense of directing their look, influencing opinions. Students understand that knowing a little about the lives of Monet, Tarsila or Frida⁸ helped to historically contextualize what they saw and contributed to a critical reflection.

After external activities, the class is also dedicated to the exchange of impressions, feelings and reflections about what was experienced, making the collective experience enrich

⁸ Claude Monet (1840-1926) – impressionist French Painter; Tarsila do Amaral (1886-1973) – Brazilian painter, representative of the modernist movement; Frida Kahlo (1907-1954) – Mexican painter.

the individual one. This sharing configured in a set of narratives is what enables the transformation of individual experience into collective experience. In this perspective, art needs to be present in curricula for teacher training not through teaching of techniques and recipes, but in the form of aesthetic experiences that acquire collectively-constructed meanings (Ostetto & Leite, 2012). What matters, then, is not how much is known about the various forms of cultural expression, but the effect they provoke.

In this sense, I argue for the urgent need for teachers and education professionals to be able to have their cultural training enhanced, emancipated, critically expanded beyond formal means, through real experiences in museums and other spaces of culture, so that they can know them, learn from them, learn from the history kept, spoken or silenced in these spaces, with their objects, and so that they can share these experiences with children, youth and adults with whom they are living in schools of different types and instances. (Kramer, 1998, p. 211)

One of the objectives of the fieldwork was to verify if cultural training had any influence, from a personal and professional point of view, on the lives of the graduates and how the discipline dialogued with the different cultures that each one brought. What did the access to cultural environments, which many students were unaware of, mean to them? Did it make a difference to go to these spaces together? Did the activities developed in the discipline affect the work with the children? And the personal life?

In the interviewees' perception, one of the first changes that the activities brought about was in the concept of culture itself and in the appropriation of the right to attend cultural spaces – which were not previously understood as their own.

It demystified that the spaces visited are not for me. (Questionnaire)

Cultural Literacy was like a trampoline of courage, because we were always very shy, sometimes I would pass by on the street and see some artwork, someone singing something and I would be like, “Oh no, that’s not for me” there was that block. After we went to the theater (Municipal of Rio de Janeiro) I think it was when the curtains were literally opened, because it was an opening even for sensitivity. And then we educators as people become sensitive, automatically become sensitive in practice too. It happens all at the same time. (Máira – current student)

There is a movement of “looking inwards” while looking outwards. As CNS-ISEPS students lived the experiences and came into contact with diverse cultures and languages, they said they realized how much this whole process broadened their view of the world and of themselves. The discomfort that a culture shock could cause or the hierarchization of one type of culture to the detriment of others led to the question of how cultures dialogued during classes.

Dialogue, dialogue. ... I think Pró-Saber, from this sensitive look on the culture, on the experience of each one, wanted to expand this culture, because it values it, it knows that it is important for the human being. (Lara – graduate)

Because sometimes you're just getting used to that little world over there, which is from television. So I think it opens up a range of possibilities for you to enrich your choices. ... There is no such prejudice, but quite the opposite. The professor welcomes what she knows, and then joins the two things together. (Luana – observer and graduate)

So art here is like the gateway to the world. There are people who have no access. A student arrives here and she's never been to a theater, to a museum; then she expands it. (Helena – observer and graduate)

The statements indicate that the students' perception is not of invasion or cultural imposition, but of widening the range of choices and possibilities of enjoyment. According to Carvalho & Porto (2013, p. 134), "if few people have access to classical works, this does not necessarily mean that they do not want them in their life, but rather that they are deprived of knowing them." The expansion of cultural references through access to museums, exhibitions, theater, music concerts, among others, through reflective and collectively-lived experiences, was perceived by the interviewees as opening a window to the world.

The realization of these activities also provided the understanding that the cognoscenti being not only learns cognitively, but integrally, with the body and the affective and aesthetic dimensions. The students declared another understanding of culture: as a citizen's right, a right that allows us to exchange, dialogue and question the reality of which we are part of, that shapes us and that we want to transform. However, as Carvalho (2001) points out, teacher training has not valued this possibility

Cultural experience raises questions, provokes the critical reflection of values and contributes not only to the training of the education professional, but also to the subjects. And the school, in general, has not valued or used this aspect in its possibility of training education professionals. (p. 76)

Final considerations

The development of the study showed that the teacher has a knowledge about the profession that he/she paradoxically does not know, or often devalues. In numerous statements the graduates stated that, among the benefits of having passed the course, one of them was being able to name what they already knew and did. This perception contributed to the empowerment and the increase of self-esteem, indicating that the meeting of theory and practice helps the teacher to build a personal repertoire of alternatives to face the daily reality, strengthening confidence in his/her own work. This repertoire of experiential knowledge can give voice and representativeness to the education professional who has been relegated to a passive role of executor of theories created far from the school floor.

The recording in the form of narrative, a recurring activity in the training of the group investigated here, is a process of authorship that marks positions before the reality and paths chosen by the teacher in his/her work. As pointed out by Ferreira, Prado, & Aragão (2015), the reflective stance before everyday life is not a natural gesture of the educator, but a social practice that needs to be developed. The study has shown that, although laborious, the regular and reflective record (the one on which the writer goes back to follow up and analyze) brings an emancipating potential, because it allows the awareness of thoughts, feelings and values that guide the writer's work. "The record allows breaking anesthesia before a blind, passive or compulsive everyday life, because it compels one to think" (Freire, 2008, p. 58).

The fact that they are encouraged to find their own voice throughout the course, in addition to the hard work that training demands, certainly contributes to the graduates to feel more confident and valued as subjects. This achievement was credited to human training, and the affective dimension is highlighted in this process. It is noteworthy that this aspect is configured as a contribution of Pró-Saber to teacher training courses: the rescue of affection, in order to melt the coldness of pure intellectualism, daring to speak of affection in academia, as Freire teaches (1997, p. 8), "It is impossible to teach without the forged, invented, and well-cared-for ability to love."

It is necessary to emphasize that the fact that the course has only one class, thus contributing to the approach between the faculty and the students, as well as to an individualized follow-up and, at the same time, a look at the group. In addition to the small number of students,

the unique qualification, which enables in-service training and the sharing of experiences, was pointed as inconvenient for those who wished to practice their profession in another segment.

The fieldwork also demonstrated that the CNS-ISEPS enables students to become aware of their role and the importance of intentionality in pedagogical action for the production of a participative, meaningful and loving everyday life with children. The conception of childhood and early childhood education aligned with the guiding documents, and adopted by the institution, seems to lead educators to consider children as subjects in the educational process, developing a careful look and listening.

It was also noticed that a cultural and aesthetic training contributes for teachers to widen the range of possibilities in working with different languages. The stimulus to authorship and cultural experiences in the training process of the investigated group changed the students' practice. Several statements showed the desire to share with the children the discoveries they were making. This desire to share and transform the everyday life with children, as well as the changes in their own habits of family leisure expressed in the testimonies, confirm that a training that includes the cultural and aesthetic dimension favors the break of a cycle of sociocultural exclusion, still striking in Brazilian society. There is much to be done about this bias in teacher training; educational policies that include the cultural dimension in a systematized and problematizing manner in training courses are needed. Similarly, public policies that value, prioritize and organize permanent access to different cultural events can help to alleviate the social inequality in the country and give citizens the right to share and enrich themselves culturally.

Given the above, it is possible to state that educational policies that respect the teacher's autonomy and do not condition his/her freedom – without excluding a consistent theoretical basis – create favorable conditions for each professional to find their form, appropriate to their reality and that will allow the work to result in effective student learning. Nevertheless, the study showed that in the process of teacher training the affective dimension should not be absent, including a cultural training and a more effective articulation between theory and practice.

Finally, it is worth remembering that training is a right of all teachers and that the guiding axis of a training proposal that considers the professionals' knowledge and values is the critical reflection on practice, with culture going through the whole training process and possibility of establishing moments of exchange between peers in the construction of knowledge.

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