

TEACHER CAREERS AND TEACHER EDUCATION : A BRAZILIAN DILEMMA

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Abstract

The professional aspect of teacher education is in the core of a more general context of teachers' work. One of the most marking issues of this work's conditions, as cause and consequence of many problems, is its insertion in a career framework. At which point of this framework are teaching careers? What consequences for the teaching work may be anticipated from this relative position of teaching in the general career framework? Let us examine this situation from the Brazilian viewpoint. To discuss this subject, a study that deals with career hierarchy in higher education, the socioeconomic profile of undergraduates of some careers related to teacher formation and the position of these careers in the Brazilian university context was conducted. Socioeconomic data were obtained from national microdata of undergraduate students in a time series from 2000 to 2008. The investigation concluded that there is a strong internal hierarchy among careers in Brazil, revealing its effects in symbolic, intra institutional, employment, salary, and corporate terms. This scenario has persisted over time, without the entry of new profiles in teaching careers, traditionally addressed to low-income students.

Key words: *careers hierarchy, sociology of education, teacher education.*

Introduction

Brazil faces nowadays a double crisis in teacher formation, those of quantitative and qualitative nature. The quantitative crisis is revealed in all the subjects of basic education since there is no discipline in which the number of teachers with specific formation – for example, Mathematics teacher graduated in Mathematics – is equal or superior to the real demand. Moreover, the quality of formation verified in national exams reveals itself insufficient (Ristoff, 2012). The courses of teacher formation have attracted few students and cannot offer a solid formation to their students. It would be relevant to analyze this problem under the perspective of the careers.

The professional aspect of teacher education is in the core of a more general context of teachers' work. Undoubtedly, one of the most marking aspects of this work's conditions, as cause and consequence of many problems, is its insertion in a career framework.

At which point of this framework are teaching careers? What would indicate their level of professionalization compared to other careers? What consequences for the teaching work may be anticipated from this relative position of teaching in the general career framework? Let us examine this situation from the Brazilian viewpoint, trying to compare it with other realities.

Professionalization in Brazil: General and Specific Aspects

The thematic approach of professions becomes more relevant as modern society proves professionalized. According to Barbosa (2003), “professionalism may be considered the modern way to organize social inequalities”. What happens, as stated by the same author, is that professions become social groups – professional groups – with great capacity to organize social relations; this capacity starts to influence the world’s structural and hierarchical organization as a whole¹. This arrangement makes professionalization a tool for social mobility, because “professionalization is the collective project of social mobility that eventually guarantees monopolies on service provision and certain privileges in the occupational structure” (Bastos, 2004, p. 57). Professional hierarchization is the particular manner to organize these inequalities (Larson, 1997). Therefore, the existence of a rigid career hierarchy reflects the unequal conditions surrounding the exercise of occupational privileges and monopolies.

In the Brazilian case, it’s possible to talk about a State constituted by professional groups. Beyond physicians’ universal and everlasting prestige, the State’s formation and maintenance may be associated with the support by two groups: lawyers in colonial Brazil; engineers, indispensable to the movements of industrialization; and again, lawyers, in the transition to the third millennium, within the judicialization of social relations (Barbosa, 2003 and 1993).

The case of lawyers is illustrative. Although higher education has not occupied the central position it took in the 19th century in Europe and the United States, university graduates were decisive actors in the construction of the Brazilian national State. Especially significant is the contrast between the importance of Brazilian founders, predominantly jurists, and the weight of the military in the foundation of Ibero-American countries. José Murilo de Carvalho (1980) evidenced, when studying the political elite of the empire, our legal formation initiated at the University of Coimbra, making up the first generation of statesmen, as the essential ingredient of the Brazilian mandarin network. Possibly, there was, from Coimbra to Brazilian law schools, an internalized process of the constitution and replacement of the mandarin network, efficiently continued during our whole history. Nowadays we still may observe the predominance of Law graduates in the Brazilian political administrative representations.

Such a circumstance does not go unnoticed by students. For 80% of university graduating students in 2009, “undergoing professional education is the main contribution of the course. That is, students attend higher education in search of a profession” (Ristoff and Sevegnani, 2010, p. 91).

As a result, between 2002 and 2009, the estimated number of people with a university degree in Brazil according to the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD) changed from 6.9 to 12.2 million. It represents a 74.8% increase, what corresponds to almost 750 thousand new graduating students per year. The highest increase was observed among women; in the category color, among blacks and mixed-race people.

By career, the highest increase was that among teaching professionals with higher education degrees. They were 1,076 million in 2002, and changed to 2,096 million in 2009, a 94.7% increase. In total, 80% of these professional taught elementary school. This increase is explained by the high number of elementary school teachers who graduated in this period. In 2002, there were 2.7 million teaching professionals, 46% of them with a university degree; in 2009, there were 3.7 million, 61% with a university degree.

In that period, income differences due to schooling decreased, but attaining higher education still means to earn 193% more than average, compared to 173% in 2002. The advantage of people who have a university degree over those graduated at high school was three times in 2002, against 2.8 times in 2009 (income of all works by people over 18). Income varies among the several occupation groups with higher education, but differences in relation to those

¹ Social marker of great importance, for example, to presentation rites in society.

with no degree are very significant. The average income earned by teaching professionals with a university degree is R\$ 2,022.00, a difference of 59%. For professionals of the exact sciences and engineering, it is R\$ 4,375.00², a gain of 117% (Schwartzman, 2011).

Even with all those advantages, disparities in the salary return of careers stand out. It is a matter of concern to us in so far as we worry about the working conditions of education professionals.

Higher Education, Professionalization, and Careers

As salary differences among careers stand out, there is another related point to be discussed: higher education is the field of professionalization, par excellence. Professions, in turn, are divided according to their institutional character, organization, political weight, social prestige, etc. Each one of them will fall into a corresponding pattern of social, economic and symbolic profitability.

For that reason, we cannot ignore the fact that the respect achieved by bearers of university degrees brings internal distinctions, translated into career hierarchy. Taking higher education as the constituting and safekeeping field of professionalization and profitable titles in the economic, social and symbolic market, we understand that any investigation about it must be careful to avoid generalizations. Thus, we did not conceal the selection of courses in our study; quite the opposite, it is here privileged.

The more or less generalized context of devaluation experienced by teaching-related careers is a source of worry, because it constitutes cause and effect of a lot of difficulties related to teacher formation, in a kind of vicious circle. Accordingly, the low perceived status and the low remuneration rates of these careers, usually lacking professional associations that may strengthen them, conform to the inadequate job supply for present and future teachers. Inequality between these and other careers is considerable and extends over time. Many of the problems experienced in the daily process of teaching education and practice – despondency, shortage of material and academic resources to complete a course, limited political bargaining power – originate in this field.

The social effects of these careers' lowliness have been easily observed in Brazil: elementary school teachers with a university degree earn less than the average population with similar instruction level. Considering teachers with no university degree, the salary average is inferior to that of the total population, according to tables from the 2006 PNAD (Salário, 2008). Probably related to this fact, we may verify a shortage of almost 250,000 teachers at Brazilian public schools, taking into consideration the needs of middle and high school in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Mathematics (Faltam, 2007). One cannot say that these teachers do not exist: an unpublished study by the Ministry of Education (MEC) demonstrates that except for Physics and Chemistry, there are more graduates than necessary to teach all the classes wanting teachers. The survey claims that there are enough graduate teachers to meet the demand, but they choose other jobs (Falta, 2007).

This external aspect of discredited careers attained by teacher education programs has a counterpart inside post-secondary education institutions, where these courses also lack prestige. Comparing facilities, a number of professors per student, the hours when the courses are offered, and research grants, there are hierarchical distances among schools within a university. In a debate about democratization of the campus held by Anísio Teixeira National Institute of Educational Studies and Researches (INEP), one of the lecturers affirms: "university decision-makers are internally investing more in courses chosen by the elite. Wise investments, though, are not made in courses joined by the poor" (Santos, 2010, p. 83). On the other hand, a Chemistry student of an evening course at Federal University of Minas Gerais (UFMG) stated about that

2 About US \$997.88 and US \$2,159.11 respectively.

point: “UFMG conceals the fact that there are no serious initiatives for the promotion of social inclusion. In the evening there are no speeches, seminars, courses. Our formation is restricted to the core curriculum. Libraries are close and I have difficulty in borrowing books. Everything is much more difficult” (Rede, 2006).

The social composition of the different courses reflects and nurtures this hierarchy. From the entrance examinations to the exams that reveal the profile of graduating students, what stands out is the influence of social condition on the distribution of courses and their regular attendees.

Students’ Socioeconomic Profile, Career, and Professional Destination

Nogueira shows (2005, p. 11) the several aspects of career choice in school trajectories: “[...] the choice of an undergraduate course may be described as the result of a set of perceptions (beliefs and values explicitly fostered or tacitly cherished as practical knowledge) that one holds in relation to himself and the acting environment”. The correlation between “social place” and individual perception supports the occurrence of self-selection in the choice of an undergraduate course, joining the objective and subjective dimensions of reality.

In order to face this problem we must ask what kind of profile, in socio-economic terms, has teaching attracted. May one think of recruitment in close affinity with vocational perspective? What bargaining power as a professional category would these professionals have to use in keeping monopoly and privileges that guarantee respect for their career? Which position inside universities is occupied by teacher education courses in relation to funds, symbolic expression, and input? To discuss this subject, we conducted a study that deals with career hierarchy in higher education, the socioeconomic profile of undergraduates of some careers related to teacher formation, and the position of these careers in the Brazilian university context. The selected careers were Language and Literature and Mathematics, main subjects in the life school, and courses that traditionally graduate teachers and reflect two great knowledge areas, in a time series.

For the purpose of conducting this study, micro data from the “Provão” and ENADE³ (tests for undergraduate students, which evaluate higher education in Brazil) were used in a time series from 2000 to 2008, the most recent years in which this test takes place. They were taken by all undergraduates, along with a socio-economic questionnaire.

From that questionnaire we selected some indicators that literature considers advantageous in the schooling process: color, parents’ titles, school of origin and occupation status (Foracchi, 1997, Martins, 2006, Schwartzman, 2000). The examination of these indicators’ behavior in each career compared with all the others present at the tests in those years started to guide the study.

The group of those other careers was named “General”. In 2000, the “General” category comprised the following courses: Management, Agronomy, Biology, Social Communication, Law, Economics, Engineering, Physics, Language and Literature, Mathematics, Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry, Psychology, and Chemistry. In 2001, it included all those and also Pharmacy and Pedagogy. In 2002, Architecture, Accountancy, Nursing and History were added. In 2003, it had all the previous and Speech and Language Pathology, and Geography. In 2004 Language and Literature and Mathematics were not evaluated, and in 2005 and 2008 they were evaluated along with Architecture, Computer Science, Biology, Social Science, Engineering, Philosophy, Physics, Geography, History, Pedagogy and Chemistry.

The evolution of some of these indicators is presented in the following Table, in percent terms.

³ The test name was changed from Provão to ENADE in 2004. Provided by INEP in CD-ROM on request or downloaded from the site. The database was set up in SPSS.

Table 1. Economic variables, by career and “General” group – 2000-2008.

Years	Groups/Careers	White	Higher Education		Does not work	School of origin
			Father	Mother		Private
2000	General	80.17	30.13	24.34	31.64	43.18
	Language/Literature	70.64	9.65	9.95	20.70	20.77
	Mathematics	73.19	8.39	8.90	18.77	18.63
2001	General	77.48	26.74	22.68	30.55	39.69
	Language/Literature	68.98	8.93	9.80	19.66	20.56
	Mathematics	67.10	8.13	9.30	17.43	20.03
2002	General	76.10	24.55	21.49	28.48	35.18
	Language/Literature	69.85	9.50	10.26	19.09	18.97
	Mathematics	64.37	7.68	9.40	18.41	17.70
2003	General	72.68	24.05	21.95	28.27	35.03
	Language/Literature	62.89	9.38	10.73	20.32	19.66
	Mathematics	61.91	7.91	9.92	19.60	17.94
2005	General	70,19	22,29	21,40	25,98	32,89
	Language/Literature	60,41	10,53	12,78	18,43	18,85
	Mathematics	64,32	9,10	10,88	15,91	15,22
2008	General	68,90	21,56	21,16	24,15	32,64
	Language/Literature	55,12	8,56	11,78	16,58	15,87
	Mathematics	56,88	6,78	11,22	14,11	13,87

Source: Micro data from Provão and ENADE (drawn by the author)

The selected courses are more socially unfavorable than those of the “General” group. There are fewer students who are white, have undergraduate parents, do not work, come from private secondary schools in the teaching careers than in the “General” group. Besides, we must consider that in each year a group of career goes through the tests. Until 2003, Language/Literature and Mathematics were inserted in more heterogeneous and elite groups, a fact which explains the wider detachment among the profiles. In 2005 and 2008, the set of disciplines evaluated did not include the courses of Medicine and Law, for example, which produced a small decrease in the socio-economic profile and, therefore, a bigger approach between Language/Literature and Mathematics with the general profile.

Later, data evolution was examined over time, observing a pattern of stability in all indicators, not reflecting expressive alterations of socio-economic profile in the courses. It is important to highlight that the studied years correspond to a moment of higher education expansion, with increased enrolments, what could have changed the socio-economic profile of undergraduates in these courses.

Teacher Education "From the Inside"

Would this whole previously described asymmetric situation be reflected inside the institutions of higher education? This is what we are discussing next. The observed vicious circle establishes a reality in which the equation terms denouncing inequality are responsible for nurturing it.

As it is possible to observe, low social prestige and low rates of remuneration in some careers – lacking representative associations that may strengthen them – conform to the inadequate job supply for present and future teachers, inside and outside the courses that prepare them.

One must remember, as a comparison, the situation of careers counting on strong professional associations: Medicine – the Federal and the Regional Councils of Medicine; Law – the Brazilian Bar Association; Engineering – the Federal and Regional Councils of Engineering; Management – the Federal and Regional Councils of Management. These associations may strengthen their careers at institutional, salary, symbolic, political and market levels. Besides, courses in these areas may open, close or expand according to what these entities express, what guarantees restricted access to the profession. For example, according to decree 5773/2006, the creation of courses of Law or those of Medicine, Dentistry and Psychology must be submitted to the Federal Council of the Brazilian Bar Association or the National Council of Health. Accreditation and accreditation renewals, according to the same decree, imply not only the considerations of these associations, but, under article 37: "in the case of a course corresponding to a regulated profession, the Secretariat will establish a limit of 60 days for the profession regulation organ, of national scope, if willing, to offer data for the Ministry of Education's decision. Meanwhile, however much active teacher unions are, there is no equivalent action or existing legal basis in our country.

Another aspect of the problem must be considered, concerning the interior of institutions. Could we think of an environment, opposite to the professional-corporate and business scenario, in which the several courses integrated, in equal conditions, inside university? Unfortunately we do not, and for a historical reason.

Quoting Anísio Teixeira (UFRJ, 2007, p. 12), "because schools were created as isolated institutions of professional education, they tend to keep, even when integrated at university, their loyalty towards the school, not towards university". Then, a poor sense of solidarity among courses is fostered. Inversely, competition for resources and benefits, and no common identity, seem to be the historical mark of Brazilian universities. In this case, the law of the jungle prevails: the more fragile courses are (even the founding courses such as teacher education), the more fragile they will remain inside institutions.

This point of view is shared by Darcy Ribeiro: "from there comes the structure of these universities established as federations and professional schools, not only autonomous for their independence from university, but also, stuck in their isolation, including because of the hostility among them" (Ribeiro, 1975, p. 39). A seriously contradictory aspect is shown: the system does not materialize as a university, but uses the socially valued image of the university. Denying this would mean despising Lessa's serious advice:

The exercise of self criticism is mandatory; at the same time, the perception of the University as a non-Euclidian mirror of the Brazilian society (...) University internalizes, enlarges and sometimes distorts general problems of Brazilian life. The academy reproduces nation's virtues, potentials, blemishes, limitations, idiosyncrasies, and vices. We need to stop saying we are good, misunderstood, and victims of injustice; that our problems come from lack of resources. There is more than a grain of truth here, however we must admit there is no reason for us to be an island of happiness (1999, p. 29).

What seems more serious, in this case, comes as a final question: how much of this inequality is daily nurtured by higher education institutions? How long will the academy hold inside it so deep inequalities of treatment, investment and care among careers?

It is true that these inequalities will not be overcome except by means of revaluation of the teaching career at political, symbolic, salary and professional levels.

Final Considerations

This investigation indicates that there is an internal hierarchy among careers in Brazil, revealing its effects in symbolic, intra institutional, employment, salary, and corporate terms. This scenario has persisted over time, without the entry of new profiles in teaching careers, traditionally addressed to low-income students. The study also showed how this profile is still regarded as inferior compared to those of other careers; it is necessary to bring value back to teaching careers at political, symbolic, salary and professional levels as a way to break this vicious circle.

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