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Practical and Theoretical Dimensions in the Initial Formation of History Teachers: an Experience in the Light of Activity Theory

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ABSTRACT

This text is part of the discussions on initial teacher practice, and focuses on the specificities of History teaching. Its main objective is to raise reflections on the necessary dialogue between the theoretical and practical dimensions concerning this formation. Reports an experience lived with undergraduate students in History at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul. The data came from the answers to the questions contained in an online questionnaire to assess the reported activity. To support the intended study and the construction of inferences, the content analysis technique was chosen, which enabled the categorization operation. The apprehended concepts were analyzed and discussed under the references of the Historical-Cultural Theory of Psychology, and according to concepts referring to Education and the History teaching. The results show that the activity carried out allowed students to acquire a differentiated appropriation of the contents of the disciplines, promoted by the challenge of teaching, encouraging them to understand the teaching work as a motivation for their learning. Thereby, it allows to conclude that the formative process experienced in a degree, by encouraging the dialogue between its theoretical and practical fields, allows the attribution of other meanings and gives rise to new stimuli and motivations capable of reframing the learning processes of historical knowledge.

KEYWORDS

Education. Teacher practice. History education. Educational psychology.

Dimensões Práticas e Teóricas na Formação Inicial de Professores(as) de História: uma Experiência à Luz da Teoria da Atividade

RESUMO

Este texto inscreve-se nas discussões entabuladas sobre formação inicial de professores(as), e direciona o olhar para as especificidades do ensino de História. Seu principal objetivo é suscitar reflexões acerca da necessária interlocução entre as dimensões teórica e prática concernentes a essa formação. Relata uma experiência vivenciada com os(as) licenciandos(as) em História da Universidade Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Os dados provieram das respostas às questões constantes em um questionário on-line para avaliação da atividade relatada. Para subsidiar o estudo pretendido e a construção de inferências foi escolhida a técnica de análise de conteúdo, que possibilitou a operação de categorização. As concepções apreendidas foram analisadas e discutidas sob os referenciais da Teoria Histórico-Cultural da Psicologia, e segundo os conceitos referentes à Educação e ao ensino de História. Os resultados apontam que a atividade realizada permitiu aos(as) alunos(as) uma apropriação diferenciada dos conteúdos das disciplinas, promovida pelo desafio de ensinar, incitando-os(as) a compreender o trabalho docente como motivação para suas aprendizagens. Assim, permite concluir que o processo formativo experienciado em uma licenciatura, ao incentivar a interlocução entre seus campos teórico e prático, permite a atribuição de outros sentidos e faz emergir novos estímulos e motivações capazes de ressignificar os processos de aprendizagem dos saberes históricos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação. Formação de professores. Ensino de história. Psicologia educacional.

Dimensiones Prácticas y Teóricas en la Formación Inicial de Profesores de Historia: una Experiencia a la Luz de la Teoría de la Actividad

RESUMEN

Este texto es parte de las discusiones sobre la formación inicial del profesorado y se centra en las especificidades de la enseñanza de la Historia. Su objetivo principal es plantear reflexiones sobre el diálogo necesario entre las dimensiones teóricas y prácticas sobre esta formación. Reporta una experiencia vivida con estudiantes universitarios de Historia en la Universidad Federal de Mato Grosso do Sul. Los datos provienen de las respuestas a las preguntas contenidas en un cuestionario en línea para evaluar la actividad informada. Para apoyar el estudio previsto y la construcción de inferencias, se eligió la técnica de análisis de contenido, que permitió la operación de categorización. Los conceptos apreñados fueron analizados y discutidos bajo las referencias de la Teoría Histórico-Cultural de la Psicología, y de acuerdo con los conceptos que se refieren a la Educación y la enseñanza de la Historia. Los resultados muestran que la actividad realizada permitió a los estudiantes adquirir una apropiación diferenciada de los contenidos de las disciplinas, promovida por el desafío de la enseñanza, alentándolos a entender el trabajo docente como una motivación para su aprendizaje. De este modo, permite concluir que el proceso formativo experimentado en un grado, al alentar el diálogo entre sus campos teóricos y prácticos, permite la atribución de otros significados y da lugar a nuevos estímulos y motivaciones capaces de reformular los procesos de aprendizaje del conocimiento histórico.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación. Formación preparatoria de docentes. Enseñanza de la historia. Psicología de la educación.

Introduction

The process of constituting my teaching identity, which encompasses both teaching and training, was indelibly marked, and particularly characterized by the interlocation of knowledge regarding Education and History. Thus, issues concerning school history teaching have always mattered to me especially.

I understand that the intellectual development of the individual is, in many aspects, linked to school education, because during the years of schooling the system of concepts of students, directly responsible for cognitive evolution, will be increase. Thus, I consider that this development is encouraged and dependent on school education, which, before preceding it, becomes capable of stimulating and provoking it with each new concept apprehended.

When considering especially the knowledge of History, worked during the school period. I believe that they collaborate greatly with the formation of non-spontaneous concepts related to the formation of historical orientation in students, which, in turn, will influence the formation of identity, in socialization, in the perception and understanding of the world and in objectifying the intentionality of their actions in this world.

Thus, the teaching work for the teaching of History gains significant importance in the teaching and learning relationships established in the school environment. Reiterates the relevance of constant considerations about the training of undergraduate students in History, which provoke reflections on the unique possibilities of their curriculum and the specifics of your organization.

The text I present has the central objective of provoking reflections about the initial formation of History teachers, considering the necessary approximation between their practical and theoretical dimensions. Reports an experience lived in the second semester of 2018, with students of the undergraduate course in History at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, which had as a problem the integration of the knowledge learned in the general and specific training subjects of the course with teaching practice.

The data used comes from the answers obtained through a semi-structured questionnaire, distributed and answered online by the participants, who decided to collaborate voluntarily. To support the study of conceptions and the construction of inferences, the Content Analysis technique was chose, which allowed the categorization operation.

The analyzes and discussions were guided by the concepts that integrate the Historical-Cultural Theory, based on the postulates of Vygotsky¹, Leontiev and their peers, as well as by the conceptions related to Education and History Teaching.

¹ Due to the varied translations of the Cyrillic characters used in the Russian language, there is no consensus in Brazil regarding the spelling of his name. For this reason, the Vygotski, Vigotsky, Vygotsky, Vigotski and Vigotskii variants are noticeable. The citations and bibliographical references in this article bring up the Vigotski and Vygotsky variations, so that the definitions found in the original works used are maintain. However, in textual development, Vygotsky spelling will be use as a standard.

Thus, the article is organized in three parts: "Exposing the whys: some assumptions", where the main theoretical concepts that guided the work took place: "Outlining and reporting the experience" moment when the methodological path was described and "The experience, from the perspective of the undergraduate students", which brings discussions about from the students conceptions.

Exposing the Whys: Some Assumptions

In the second semester of 2018 I worked as a substitute professor in the History course at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul. Taught the disciplines of Ancient History I, History of Brazil I, History of Brazil II and Regional History, and I felt especially disturbed by a question posed by one of the students of the 7th semester, at the end of one of the classes: "Teacher, what am I going to do with all that I learned here?"

This question deeply disturbed me, and whenever it echoed in my mind, I wondered how the attribution of meanings, internalization and personal meaning was occurring (LEONTIEV, 2004) for these students in their education initial, and what the "all this" was becoming, as I corroborate with the understanding that:

Training is not built by accumulation (of courses, knowledge or techniques), but through work of critical reflexivity on practices and the permanent (re)construction of a personal identity. That is why it is so important to invest the person and give a status to the knowledge of the experience. (NÓVOA, 1992, p. 26).

I thought of a way to contribute minimally to the integration of knowledge, learned in the general and specific training courses of the Degree in History, with the teaching practice that will be required in the future. With this in mind, I decided to invest in a different format from the usual for the seminar that was already included in the planning, in order to enable them to combine the knowledge of these disciplines with a teaching experience.

I understand that the division of subjects into content groups (general training, specific training, pedagogical training and practical dimensions in the training curriculum) of undergraduate courses, can convey erroneously and can strengthen the idea of fragmentation and independence of knowledge.

[...] the belief that one thing is disciplinary knowledge with its logic, its structure and its own modes of investigation and another thing is pedagogical knowledge, understood as the domain of teaching procedures and resources without a link with the content and methods of investigation of the discipline taught. (LIBÂNEO, 2015, p. 3).

Such a belief contributes to the harmful effect of a distance between disciplines, which goes against the necessary interdisciplinarity in teacher education, and ends up generating feelings of insecurity and doubt, expressed in the question asked by the student, mentioned above.

The denial of the necessary interlocution between historiography and the teaching of history can collaborate for a weakened historical learning to occur for undergraduates. Since they fail to see the movement between teaching practice and knowledge and, as consequence, contribute to the reproduction of the view that the function of history teaching is only to make accommodation for an adequate replication of historiography.

In that sense, I understand that

[...] History exists in the cycle in which its motivations and actions plunge from the scientific field to the dimension of practical life, and vice versa. In this context, the teaching of history cannot be enunciation, but dialogue. It does not fit the idea that History - science produces and the History taught reproduces, disseminates or didactics for the world of the uninitiated. (CERRI, 2009, p. 154).

In this way, the potentialities inherent to historical knowledge, referring to the formation of identity and conscious and intentional human activity with a practical and critical character - the praxis - that mediates between man and all material things, are empty. For these two processes to occur, people need to orient themselves historically and need to form their identity to live: "historical orientation inward - identity - historical orientation outward - praxis" (RÜSEN, 2007, p. 87).

Praxis is a fundamental condition for the production of knowledge of historical science that "is always determined, by the relation to the practical application, of the historical knowledge elaborated by research (methodology) and formatted by historiography (theory)." (RÜSEN, 2007, p. 85).

The study of praxis was central to Vygotsky and his peers, and was used as a basis for the elaboration of his thesis on human development, underpinning the Activity Theory, one of the fundamental studies of the Historical-Cultural Theory of the Evolution of the Psyche (LEONTIEV, 1996), developed by Vygotsky, Luria, Leontiev and their peers.

Initially elaborated by Vygotsky and perfected by Leontiev, the Activity Theory starts from the concepts proposed by Marx and Engels, the activity being a fundamental factor for the understanding of the human essence in these, and for the cognitive constitution in those.

Vygotsky argued that activity has been present since childhood, and that it is not possible to dissociate it from thought processes:

Our experiences brought to the fore another important point, which until now has been overlook: the role of the child's activity in the evolution of his intellectual processes. [...] This process is trigger by the child's actions; the objects it deals with represent reality and shape its thought processes. (VYGOTSKY, 2002, p. 20).

For the Historical-Cultural Theory, the formation and evolution of human consciousness do not advance from the inside out, they did not come from some spontaneous thinking or biological characteristics rather they are derive from the concrete exterior existence, translated into conscious activity, therefore:

The activity expresses the concrete relationship of the human being with reality, in which personality characteristics really appear. [...] the human being's relationship with reality, manifested by his activity, depends on his psychic processes, on his thinking. (RUBINSTEIN, 1977, p. 12).

Leontiev (1992) ratified the understandings about the activity, developing them as a theory, drawing attention to the convergence between concrete motivation and activity, which directly influences the dynamics of psychological processes, and thus conceptualized:

By activity, we designate processes psychologically characterized by what the process, as a whole, is directed (i.e., object), always coinciding with the objective that stimulates the subject to perform this activity, that is, the reason. (LEONTIEV, 1992, p. 68).

Both teaching work and learning, when performed intentionally, critically and consciously, to meet a motivation, are activities that have an important influence on the subject's constitution.

Considered as an activity of consciousness arising from external material life (DAVÍDOV; MÁRKOVA, 1987), teaching and learning become an important factor for human development, for the formation of personality and for the constitution of identity.

From the above, I understand that the initial training for the exercise of the teaching profession, here analyzing in particular the teaching of History, should appear as a conscious, planned, and structured activity to achieve established objectives, using practical situations to re-signify the student learning

Outlining and Reporting the Experience

With these assumptions in mind, the proposal of the seminar, described above, was to create moments for the students of the course to think about teaching History for the years of elementary and high school, promoting the dialogue of the themes studied in the disciplines of Ancient History I, History of Brazil I, History of Brazil II and Regional History.

Thus, each group of students should assemble the presentation of one of the themes studied in the subjects, in the format of a 50-minute class, to teach in one of the final grades of elementary school, or for the grades of high school. . The groups were free to plan and organize their class, being able to use any resources (films, videos, documentaries, photos and images, posters, games, etc.).

The presentations took place in the months of September and October 2018 and, after completing the seminars, I communicated to everyone that I would send a questionnaire as a way to evaluate our experience. I clarified that filling out the questionnaire was not mandatory, and that, therefore, it would not interfere in the evaluation of the papers presented.

I prepared the questionnaire on Google® Documents – Forms (Appendix A), and forwarded it by e-mail to all participants. In it, I emphasized that anonymity would be ensured, since this tool does not store the identification of the responses e-mail, and that the data obtained there would be used in the future as a source of research on History Teaching.

In total 174 students took the seminar, with the following division by subject: Ancient History I - 71 students; History of Brazil I - 33 students; History of Brazil II - 31 students and Regional History - 39 students. Of these, only 34 agreed to participate in the research and answered the questionnaire, and therefore, for this article, these responses were considered and analyzed.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: identification and evaluation of the seminar. In the part reserved for identification, students should inform which age group they fit in, their gender, education and teaching activities that they have already carried out.

The part reserved for the evaluation of the seminar was composed of the following questions: 1) Write the positive points about the activity proposed in the first seminar. 2) Write down the negative points about the proposed activity. 3) What were your difficulties to carry out this activity? 4) How the activity performed contributed to your teacher training? 5) Different considerations.

For the study of the obtained data, Content Analysis was chosen (BARDIN, 1977), having a categorical analysis (FRANCO, 2003, p. 13), as an inference technique, allowing a wide understanding of the messages.

From the analyzes, eight categories emerged, a knowledge: approximation of school routine; formation of the teaching identity; teaching skills; interlocution between theory and practice; differentiated practices, difficulties with the group, difficulties with the method and another.

The theoretical discussion that will take place in the item "Experience, from the perspective of the undergraduates" of this article, considered the category "Interlocution theory and practice", which was derived from the responses that highlighted the importance of this dialogue for the knowledge production during initial teacher training.

Brief Profile of the Participants

Of the 34 participating students, 50% were female and the highest percentage (32.4%) is in the age group "25 to 35 years", followed by the students who have between 18 to 25 years (29.4%). The third highest incidence was observed in the range "35 to 50 years" (26.5%) and the range with the lowest number of participants was "Over 50 years" (11.8%). No participant fit the track "Under 18".

Regarding academic experience, the majority of participants, 61.8%, informed that they were in a higher education course for the first time. As for the experience related to teaching practice and/or work carried out in a school environment, 8.8% of the participants reported that they had already taught, 35.3% had already completed a Mandatory Internship, 17.6% participated in the Institutional Scholarship Program of Teaching Initiation – PIBID, 14.7% had participated in Teaching Practice projects and most of the students declared that they had never carried out any teaching-related activity in a school (38.2%).

Experience From the Perspective of the Undergraduate Students

The presentation of a seminar, in addition to preparing us to be in front of a room full of students, makes us read more so that we can understand the content and work with the acquired knowledge. (Student8²).

The student's opinion, in title (Student8), reinforces the importance of teaching practice directly combined with the theory worked in the undergraduate course. I am aware of the variety of knowledge that we must build during the initial training of teachers, and of how arduous and complex these tasks are. But I understand that a facilitating way would be to really break with the dissension between theoretical and practical-pedagogical disciplines. Once that I believe that the education of these students should be integral, and, seen in this way, cannot overvalue one to the detriment of the other.

I understand that

[...] a teacher training system needs to seek a unity in the formative process that ensures more solid theoretical and practical relations between the didactics and the epistemology of sciences, breaking with the separation and parallelism between disciplinary knowledge and pedagogical-didactic knowledge. (LIBÂNEO, 2015, p. 19).

I believe that pursuing such a unity is the path that will lead to results that are significantly important for initial teacher education. Since "Teacher education cannot be thought of from the sciences and its various disciplinary fields, as an addendum to these areas" (GATTI, 2010, p. 1375), in addition to such thinking, the field of practices must be link to the scientific content of specific disciplines.

Jörn Rüsen (2007) when expressing his thoughts about historical formation corroborates these understandings. He states that training must associate skills with cognitive levels and conversely and link scientific knowledge to the areas of its use in practical life, to the dimensions of praxis.

² The student's conceptions will appear from this point onwards as citations, identified with the expression Student and numeral.

Thus, I agree with the Rüsenian theory about the didactics of history, when the author recommends: "One of the most important fields of practical application of historical knowledge is teaching and learning history" (RÜSEN, 2015, p. 247).

Allied to such understandings, I highlight the student's conceptions:

I believe that training to be a teacher slowly undergoes changes in ways of thinking about the world, of being able to dialogue with all people [...]. And working with these seminars as a class is very enriching. [...] we have a minimal desire to materialize thoughts for supposed people in the construction phase of ideals and ideals. (Student16).

When explaining that she felt her motivation to teach renewed, stimulated to "materialize the thoughts" of the specific discipline, student allowed me to infer that the approximation of the studied content with an action inherent to the teaching work, allowed a resignification of historical knowledge.

In the view of Vygotsky (2001), the apprehension of the systematized knowledge by the subjects in school education, is only effective in the dialectical relationship with the knowledge coming from the student's concrete life. It must be permeated by its motivations and interests, thus moving away from the transmission of watertight concepts, devoid of meaning, distanced from its living and practical activities. The methods that work with this empty transmission end up "becoming dead and empty verbal schemes." (VIGOTSKI, 2001, p. 247).

In sense also the other student's impressions:

The University is a place to explore alternatives, test resources to put into practice when we are in the classroom. Only content without working on a practice would leave the course far from what a licensee needs. (Student4).

I consider that, in a degree, teaching practice expresses the centrality of its purpose, which is to train teachers for Basic Education, and of its reason, to contribute to the formation of new generations. With these agents present, we have work activities in the formative actions, which insert students into the universe of their future profession, as taught by Leontiev (2004, p. 86): "Henceforth, the link that it exists between the object of an action (its end) and the generator of the activity (its reason). It appears to you in its immediately sensitive form, in the form of human collective work activity".

The activities, for being carry out for a reason, are responsible for developing higher psychological functions³. This is because, in order for them to materialize, they depend on a previous intrapsychic elaboration, and during their materialization arouse several reactions in their participants. From this interaction, new concepts formed and appropriated, contributing to the psychic structuring and encouraging cognitive development.

³ "[...] logical memory, voluntary attention, creative imagination, thinking about concepts, superior sensations and predictive will" (VYGOTSKY, 2000, p. 18, my translation).

Thus, I believe that both teaching work and learning can be understood as activities related to school education, regardless of level, provided they are carried out based on a motivation, but it is necessary to consider that their objects are significantly different, as each particular activity has a peculiar essence, constituted by singular motives and actions (LEONTIEV, 1984).

In the excerpt below, the student writes about her perception, which highlights this difference:

I believe that these seminars with elaborations with the subjects that we studied in the graduation in a didactic way for the basic education helps us to a greater understanding of the subjects for us, students of the degree and also for the students of the basic school education. (Student16).

When the activity of learning is carry out, its possibilities to collaborate with the processes of understanding and assimilation of contents. For that, it is necessary that there is an appropriate organization of the steps of the external actions of the student,

[...] that leads to its external conversion (materials), ideal or stored, or the fundamental content of the assimilation process; a correct organization of the student's objective external activity, which ensures such a transformation, is the fundamental principle to guide in a rational direction of the study process⁴. (GALPERIN, ZAPOROZHETS, ELKONIN, 1987, p. 302, my translation).

I understand, therefore, that the assimilation of new concepts made easy and made possible by the activity. I also consider that the "correct organization" mentioned in the excerpt above, is not restricted to just defining the composition of an activity, in addition, it is essential to create ways to provoke and stimulate students to the constitutive processes of the study.

It is important to highlight that the study alone does not guarantee assimilation or psychic development. These processes will only be effective from the attribution of a personal link. This only established from a motivation, having it as a basic attribute for its formation, also needing the awakening of positive emotions, and from there it can interfere in the formation of identity and in the constitution of a person:

It is essential to take into account that the person must not "dissolve" in the activity. In relation to the study, this means that psychic development should not directly deduced from the logic of the study activity. During its formation, it must reveal and create the conditions for the activity to acquire a personal meaning it becomes the source of the individual's self-development, of the multilateral development of his personality, on the condition of his inclusion in social practice⁵. (DAVÍDOV; MÁRKOVA, 1987, p. 320, my translation).

4 [...] que les conduce a su conversión externa (material) en la interna (ideal) constituye el contenido fundamental del proceso de asimilación; la correcta organización de la actividad objeto externo del alumno, lo que asegura una transformación de este tipo es el principio fundamental que debe ser guiado por la dirección racional del proceso de estudio.

5 Es indispensable tomar en consideración que la persona no debe «disolverse» en la actividad. En relación con el estudio, esto significa que el desarrollo psíquico no debe deducirse directamente de la lógica de la actividad de

The teacher's concern should not be limited to the fact that his students think deeply and assimilate concepts and theories. Emotional reactions need to occupy a prominent place in the educational process (VIGOTSKI, 2003, p. 121). A meaningful learning activity is dependent on the harmonic interrelationship between affective (emotions) and intellectual processes, since "[...] emotion is no less important tool than thought." (VIGOTSKI, 2003, p. 121).

Therefore, when the learning activity is limited to itself, it is unable to influence psychic development, since, for this to happen, it is necessary that a personal attribution of meaning take place.

Possible Considerations

The experience with the students at the seminars provided special moments, far beyond my initial expectations. It provided very rich exchanges and learning for the participants, and especially for me and, despite the difficulties encountered, I considered the results as positive.

It was possible to notice that many students had problems with the proposed format, since they were not used to working with a practical activity of teaching History in the specific subjects. But this was seen as a challenge and, when asked if the activity contributed to their teacher training, they answered unanimously that they did.

I believe that the experience brought as a main result the possibility of making the students appropriate themselves in a different way from the contents of the subjects, encouraging them to reflect on the teaching work as a motivation for learning.

I am a graduate of the same degree course in History, and in the years I worked as a teacher I taught several disciplines, some of which were general, others with specific training and practical dimensions, and both as a student and as a teacher, I understood that teaching practice could contribute more effectively to the learning of specific disciplines.

Finally, I consider that the training process worked on in a degree cannot do without the interlocution between its theoretical and practical fields. As this dialogue brings meaning and motivation to the proposed actions that will result in activities capable of resignifying the learning of historical knowledge, while who collaborate in an important way for the constitution of future teachers and for their psychic development.

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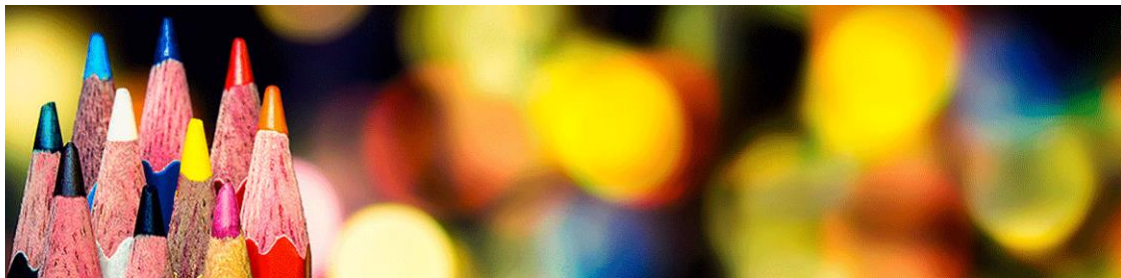
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Appendix A

Quiz



Evaluation of Activity

Dear student, you are being invited to participate in an evaluation of one of the activities carried out in the classroom. It will be part of a research on Teaching Practice in History. Your participation is NOT mandatory and anonymity this guaranteed.

This questionnaire consists of identification information and questions about the first Seminar held in the disciplines of Ancient History I, History of Brazil I, History of Brazil II and Regional History.

The purpose of this seminar was to create moments for you, students of the Degree in History at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul, to practice the practice of teaching History (for the years of elementary and high school), in dialogue with the themes studied in the discipline.

Thank you in advance for your collaboration.

• Age

- ☐ Less than 18
- ☐ From 18 to 25 years old
- ☐ 25 to 35 years old
- ☐ 35 to 50 years old
- ☐ Over to 50 years old

• Sex

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Feminine

• It is your first graduation/licentiate

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

• If your previous answer was no, what was the course of your first undergraduate/degree?

• Have you ever carried out any activity related to teaching at a school?

- ☐ Yes, Required Internship
- ☐ Yes, PIBID
- ☐ Yes, Teaching Practice Projects
- ☐ Yes, I'm already a teacher
- ☐ Never

• If the previous answer was yes, inform the time of your experience and in which discipline.

• Write the positive points about the activity proposed in the first seminar (prepare a class for basic education on the topics studied in the discipline).

• Write down the negative points about the activity proposed in the first seminar (prepare a class for basic education on the topics studied in the discipline).

• What were your difficulties in carrying out the activity?

• Do you consider that the activity performed contributes to your teacher training?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

• Justify your previous answer

• Write here other impressions that you consider important