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ARTICLE

THE CONTRIBUTION OF EJA TEACHER EDUCATORS TO SUSTAINING THE IDEAS OF POPULAR EDUCATION

CLARICE WILKEN DE PINHO[1]
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8028-2639
<clarice_fae@yahoo.com.br>
LEÔNCIO SOARES[1]
ORCID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4750-2529
<leonciogsoares@gmail.com>
OSMAR FÁVERO[2]
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7749-5887
<ofavero@gmail.com>

[1] Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais (MG), Brazil.
[2] Universidade Federal Fluminense. Niterói, Rio de Janeiro (RJ), Brazil.

ABSTRACT: This article analyzes the contribution of teacher educators to sustaining the ideals of Popular Education framework in the initial and/or continuing education of educators working in Youth and Adult Education (Educação de Jovens e Adultos—EJA). The central question concerns when, where, and how the interviewees worked in the preparation of EJA educators throughout their careers. Methodologically, we identified prominent figures in the history of EJA and selected five teachers educators with long and diverse careers: Maria Amélia Gomes de Castro Giovanetti (MG), Timothy Denis Ireland (PB), Elza Maria Fonseca Falkembach (RS), Edna Castro de Oliveira (ES), and Sérgio Haddad (SP). The selection criteria aimed to include both men and women from different regions of the country who worked both at universities and in other educational spaces. We soughtunderstand their trajectories through autobiographical accounts, as this methodology allows researchers to reconstruct participants' meaningful memories. The findings reveal how training in EJA should occur, based on four principles: (1) the perspective of Popular Education; (2) mastery of content and methodologies specific to the field; (3) the construction of human relationships grounded in the recognition of the other; and (4) reflection as an educational process. We conclude that teacher educators contribute to the training of others through the accumulated experiences, with Popular Education playing a crucial role in their ongoing cycles of reflection–action–reflection throughout their lives.

Keywords: Youth and Adult Education, teacher training, Popular Education.

A CONTRIBUIÇÃO DE FORMADORES/AS DA EJA PARA A PERMANÊNCIA DO IDEÁRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO POPULAR

RESUMO: O artigo analisa a contribuição de formadores/as de educadores/as de pessoas jovens e adultas para a permanência do ideário da Educação Popular na formação inicial e/ou continuada da Educação de Jovens e Adultos - EJA. Como questão central, procuramos responder quando, onde e como os/as entrevistados/as trabalharam na formação de educadores/as da EJA ao longo de suas

trajetórias. Como caminho metodológico, realizamos um levantamento de nomes de referência na história da EJA e selecionamos cinco formadores/as com trajetórias longevas e diversificadas: Maria Amélia Gomes de Castro Giovanetti (MG), Timothy Denis Ireland (PB), Elza Maria Fonseca Falkembach (RS), Edna Castro de Oliveira (ES) e Sérgio Haddad (SP). Como critério de escolha, buscamos contemplar homens e mulheres de diferentes regiões do país, que trabalharam tanto nas universidades como em outros espaços formativos. Optamos por compreender suas trajetórias por meio do relato autobiográfico, uma vez que esta metodologia permite reconstruir as memórias significativas dessas pessoas. Os resultados alcançados revelam de que maneira a formação na EJA deve acontecer, tendo como base quatro princípios: 1. a perspectiva da Educação Popular; 2. o domínio do conteúdo e da metodologia próprios ao campo; 3. a construção de relações humanas fundamentadas no reconhecimento do/a outro/a e 4. a reflexão como processo formativo. Podemos afirmar que os/as formadores/as de educadores/as de pessoas jovens e adultas contribuem com a formação de outras pessoas de acordo com as experiências que foram acumulando, tendo a Educação Popular um papel importante em suas reflexões-ações-reflexões ao longo da vida.

Palavras-chave: Educação de Jovens e Adultos, formação do educador, educação popular.

EL APORTE DE LOS FORMADORES DE LA EJA A LA PERMANENCIA DE LAS IDEAS DE LA EDUCACIÓN POPULAR

RESUMEN: El artículo analiza el aporte de los/as formadores/as de educadores/as de personas jóvenes y adultas a la permanencia de las ideas de la Educación Popular en la formación inicial y/o continuada de la Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos - EJA. Como pregunta central, buscamos responder cuándo, dónde y cómo trabajaron los/as entrevistados/as en la formación de educadores/as de EJA a lo largo de sus carreras. Como abordaje metodológico, realizamos un levantamiento de nombres de referencia en la historia de la EJA y seleccionamos cinco formadores/as con trayectorias diversas y duraderas: Maria Amélia Gomes de Castro Giovanetti (MG), Timothy Denis Ireland (PB), Elza María Fonseca Falkembach (RS), Edna Castro de Oliveira (ES) y Sérgio Haddad (SP). Como criterio de selección se buscó incluir a hombres y mujeres de diferentes regiones del país, que trabajaron tanto en universidades como en otros espacios de formación. Optamos por comprender sus trayectorias a través de relatos autobiográficos, ya que esta metodología nos permite reconstruir los recuerdos significativos de estas personas. Los resultados alcanzados revelan de qué manera debe llevarse a cabo la formación en la EJA, sobre la base de cuatro principios: 1. la perspectiva de la Educación Popular; 2. el dominio del contenido y la metodología propios del campo; 3. la construcción de relaciones humanas fundamentadas en el reconocimiento del/de la otro/a; y 4. la reflexión como proceso formativo. Podemos afirmar que los/as formadores/as de educadores/as de personas jóvenes y adultas contribuyen a la formación de otras personas según las experiencias que han acumulado, teniendo la Educación Popular un papel importante en sus reflexiones-acciones-reflexiones a lo largo de la vida.

Palabras clave: Educación de Jóvenes y Adultos, formación de educadores, educación popular.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Youth and Adult Education (Educação de Jovens e Adultos—EJA) requires considering the diversity of the field, its specific characteristics, and the cultural context of the groups it serves. Following this approach helps to establish a distinct identity for EJA, a prerequisite for achieving

quality education. In Brazil, EJA is recognized as a distinct provision within Basic Education (Brazil, 1996). It encompasses an extremely diverse population, including workers (from both rural and urban areas), Indigenous people, members of *quilombola* communities, men, women, parents, young people, and the elderly. In short, a significant number of individuals are excluded from the formal schooling system due to precarious living conditions, prior access to poor-quality education, or a complete lack of access to education (Haddad, 1992).

According to Silva and Soares (2021, p. 02), the concern regarding the formal education of young people, adults, and the elderly is not new, and its scope has expanded over the last three decades: "During this period, there has been an increase in the focus on this subject within studies and research that broaden the concept of education for youth and adults, framing it as a lifelong right, in contrast to the notion of 'ensino supletivo' that had been established since the 1970s."

This article aims to analyze how teacher educators contribute to sustaining the ideals of Popular Education in the initial and/or continuing education of EJA teachers. The discussion draws on data from a broader study that examined teacher educators' trajectories and contributed to the debate on the essential elements of educator preparation within an educational policy framework committed to quality and responsive to the specific needs of young and adult learners.

To achieve this goal, we identified prominent figures in the history of EJA and selected five teacher educators from different regions of the country who had long and diverse careers in universities and other educational settings: Maria Amélia Gomes de Castro Giovanetti (Minas Gerais), Timothy Denis Ireland (Paraíba), Elza Maria Fonseca Falkembach (Rio Grande do Sul), Edna Castro de Oliveira (Espírito Santo), and Sérgio Haddad (São Paulo). The discussion centers on the trajectories of those who have contributed to the history of EJA: their backgrounds, experiences, learning, and influences they brought to their work as teacher educators. These are individuals who have dedicated, and continue to dedicate, their lives to the field of EJA, a domain with a rich history and deep roots. We believe it is often necessary to open the treasure chest of EJA's history to nourish our capacity for hope. By watering the soil, we prepare the garden "for the rose that will bloom in the spring" (Freire, 2000, p. 5).

We engage with the research of Vieira (2007, p. 2), who worked with the recollections of educators involved in popular education and culture movements during the late 1950s and early 1960s, to understand their legacy by listening to individuals whose life paths are intertwined with the history of Youth and Adult Education (EJA):

> The late 1950s and early 1960s constituted a fertile period marked by intense political activism in education. During this time, initiatives aimed at adults who had been excluded from formal education were developed through student associations, Catholic Church agencies, labor unions, and the nascent forms of popular movements. Given that the body of ideas surrounding "popular education," which took shape during this period, has significantly influenced the development of youth and adult education, we chose to interview educators who had personally experienced these initiatives.

Among the many individuals who were active during this historical period of political and cultural ferment, five were carefully selected by the author: Osmar Fávero and Aída Bezerra, who took part in the Basic Education Movement (MEB), established by the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (*Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil*-CNBB) in 1961; Vera and Zeca Barreto, who in 1963 worked on a youth and adult literacy initiative in Vila Helena Maria, Osasco, São Paulo, one of the first projects outside of the Northeast region to recreate the Paulo Freire Method; and, finally, Renato Hilário, who,

while not involved in popular education and culture movements during the 1960s, participated in activities linked to Popular Education in the following decade. Regarding these choices, the author states: "Sharing their experiences, recalling moments that shaped their personal journeys, adds different shades to the past, bringing to life circumstances and structures that might otherwise seem distant to us" (Vieira, 2016, p. 34).

In addition to Vieira, we highlight the work of Soares, who also investigated this period during his postdoctoral research[1], under the supervision of Professor Osmar Fávero. The author conducted interviews with popular educators who took part in the popular education and culture movements of the 1960s: João Francisco de Souza, Germano Coelho, Paulo Rosas, and Silke Weber, who worked with the Popular Culture Movement (MCP) in Recife; Vera and Zeca Barreto, from the initiative in Vila Helena Maria; Aída Bezerra and Osmar Fávero, from MEB; Vera Brito, from the Popular Culture Center (CPC) in Belo Horizonte; Iveline da Costa Lage, from the Popular Education Campaign of Paraíba (CEPLAR); and Moacyr de Góes, from the "*De pé no chão também se aprende a ler"* literacy initiative in Natal (Soares, 2019).

The existence of prior research underscores the importance of continuing to document the life stories of those who have contributed so significantly to the field of EJA, a field that possesses a rich history and firm roots. Pursuing this line of inquiry aids in understanding moments of rupture and intentional discontinuity within the EJA scenario, while drawing inspiration from our history to achieve what Freire (2014, p. 130) calls the untested feasibility:

> (...) the themes remain concealed by 'limit-situations' that present themselves to human beings as overwhelming historical determinants, leaving them no alternative but to adapt. In this way, human beings fail to transcend these 'limit-situations' or to discover, or even glimpse, beyond them, and in relation to them, the 'untested feasibility.'

We have inherited the stories of those who contributed to the consolidation of EJA, representatives from a generation that was unsettled, indignant, and restless in the face of an oppressive and authoritarian model of education, and who sought, instead, an insurgent form of education. However, the legacy of "Popular Education" within the professional development of educators who work with youth and adults is a topic that requires greater attention. This study contributes by presenting five previously unexplored trajectories of individuals who have worked, and continue to work, to sustain these ideals in educator preparation.

RESEARCH APPROACH

We collected 21 hours and 42 minutes of oral accounts, which were transcribed and reviewed by the respective participants. We identified four categories common to the statements of our interviewees, while preserving the unique aspects of each individual's life path. The first category is foundational background: the experiences during childhood and adolescence as a basis for choosing a particular path. The second category is professional training: the educational experiences during undergraduate and postgraduate studies that were preparation for working in EJA. The third category is

[1] As a product of the postdoctoral research, a book was published regarding the 1st National Meeting on Literacy and Popular Culture, which took place in Recife in September 1963 (Soares & Fávero, 2009). According to documents gathered by the authors, the event brought together 200 delegates representing more than 70 institutions.

political engagement: experiences of activism across various fronts of struggle alongside oppressed groups, as well as an introduction to Popular Education. The fourth category concerns participants' work as teacher educators: the knowledge and experiences they acquired and subsequently shared, which offer insights into the preparation needed to work in EJA.

The methodological approach sought to explore the varied processes through which EJA educators are prepared by selecting teacher educators with diverse backgrounds and experiences. We deemed it essential to account for factors such as regional, gender, and ethnic-racial diversity, as well as a variety of training institutions, engaging in dialogue with social movements and universities across the areas of teaching, research, and outreach. Following Arroyo (2006, p. 18), we can state that the professional development of educators working with youth and adults takes place not only within various spheres of higher education institutions but also through social movements, state and municipal education departments, EJA forums, and other gatherings within the field.

> One aspect that may have been highly beneficial for EJA is the fact that it has never managed, or perhaps never even attempted, to conform to the established educational system. Consequently, there has been no attempt to force the training of EJA educators into a rigid, predefined framework.

Fávero (2013, p. 51) highlights the emergence of Popular Education in Brazil through initiatives developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a movement not yet officially termed "Popular Education"[2] but one championed by the popular education and culture collectives of that era:

> It can be stated that those proposals represented a new understanding of what later came to be called Popular Education, conceived, from that very first moment, as a dialogical educational process that begins with the needs of the impoverished and marginalized population, aiming to help them prepare to participate in transforming the conditions of their existence, with a view toward building a democratic society.

Following the 1964 coup, the initiatives of those who had been silenced, tortured, or exiled, if not murdered, were gradually resumed or reinvented, as Haddad (1991, p. 86) states:

> The new ideas and diverse practices encouraged in the period leading up to the coup, having been suppressed, gradually began to re-emerge, exerting influence outside the state: within the social movements and in spaces of popular education, in engagement with civil society (...). Throughout the 1970s, educational movements were reborn, reinventing their work with grassroots groups through practices of organization, mobilization, and consciousness-raising in the struggle for better living conditions.

According to Jara (2020, pp. 101–102), between 1969 and 1972, pastoral agents carried out an initiative to provide training in and disseminate Popular Education, particularly "Paulo Freire's literacy method," in various countries across Latin America and elsewhere in the world:

> This team produced several reflection and study documents, which were soon developed into a book that would contribute decisively to the conceptualization of an educational proposal already circulating in many countries: Popular Education and the process of conscientization. (...) It can be said that this team, encouraged by Carlos Rodrigues Brandão, was primarily responsible for adopting the term Popular Education to designate this current of liberatory education.

[2] Among the popular education and culture movements of the 1960s, recovered and cataloged by the author, only one stands out for having already borne the name Popular Education at that time: the Popular Education Campaign of Paraíba (CEPLAR-*Campanha de Educação Popular da Paraíba*).

Jara (2020, p. 21) defines Popular Education as a "sociocultural phenomenon (whose origins date back to the 19th century and which developed with particular vigor from the 1970s onwards, under the influence of Paulo Freire)." This momentum stems, above all, from the work Pedagogy of the Oppressed, written while in exile in Chile and published in Brazil in the mid-1970s, which describes a "(...) pedagogy of the oppressed: one that must be forged 'with' them, not 'for' them, whether as individuals or as peoples, in the ceaseless struggle to reclaim their humanity" (Freire, 2014, p. 43, emphasis in the original).

For Peña and Soares (2024), Popular Education stands out as a liberating political-pedagogical conception that drives and promotes decolonial educational practices. According to the authors, its legacy makes a distinct mark on the field of EJA "(...) with Freire being one of its great inspirations; he was a proponent of the political dimension of education, the necessity of dialogue between educator and learner, popular and community participation in response to the population's needs, education as a practice of freedom, and his specific literacy system"[3] (Peña; Soares, 2024, p. 310).

Brandão (2002, p. 135) points out that, whether explicitly named or not, Popular Education provides a foundation for identity and an approach to educational work explicitly adopted by various non-governmental organizations and social movements. It also appears, in different forms, "in the educational policy programs of several municipalities and even some Brazilian states."

The history of Popular Education in Brazil is inextricably linked to the era of repression under the civil-military dictatorship (1964–1985). This period provides key insights into how the individuals, men and women, who drove processes of social change engaged in insurgent actions, demonstrating an ability to "create, recreate, systematize, and spread throughout the world something akin to the form of education discussed here" (Brandão, 2020, p. 16). The years of the Brazilian dictatorship fostered a specific pursuit among these individuals: a refusal to bow down, a rejection of passive acceptance, and a commitment to seeking out alternatives.

The selection of the five participants reflects a focus on the 1960s and 1970s, when they completed their undergraduate degrees and became actively involved in EJA practice and research. The period under analysis coincides with Brazil's turbulent military dictatorship, a time during which each participant recounted the path of their insurgent struggle and their persistent commitment to this ideal. The choice of an autobiographical approach is justified by our interest in the narratives of individuals with long-standing experience in EJA, a perspective that, we hypothesized, would offer significant contributions to the research.

Galvão, Neiva and Jinzenji (2018) state that the process of producing autobiographical memory is guided by the present. Given the place they occupy at the time of the narrative, the author of the story selects what makes up their story, "so that the beginning is related to what the end will be" (Galvão; Neiva; Jinzenji, 2018, p. 195). The authors state:

> It is, therefore, a dual process of mediation: first, through the filter of memory (which also encompasses factors such as censorship, self-censorship, and the intended audience); and second, through the process of textual production (which is influenced, among other things, by the author's relationship with writing and the conditions of publication). In this type of narrative, the author seeks to bring coherence to what are, in essence, facts (re)constructed, simultaneously, amidst the haze of both remembrance and oblivion (Galvão; Neiva; Jinzenji, 2018, p. 194).

[3] Our translation.

As Delory-Momberger (2005, p. 14) maintains, autobiographical discourse "is rooted in a more fundamental human attitude, which consists of 'narratively configuring' the temporal succession of one's experience."[4] According to Pollak (1989, p. 10):

> Memory, that collective process involving past events and the interpretations thereof that one seeks to preserve, is, as we have seen, bound up in more or less conscious attempts to define and reinforce a sense of belonging and social boundaries among groups of varying scales: political parties, labor unions, churches, villages, regions, clans, families, nations, and so on. References to the past serve to maintain the cohesion of the groups and institutions that make up a society, to define their respective places and how they complement one another, but also to delineate irreconcilable oppositions.

Thus, the history of EJA reveals a collective of men and women who, for a long time, have been striving for an emancipatory education, represented in this work by five individuals whose trajectories intersect with those of many other EJA teacher educators:

- Maria Amélia Gomes de Castro Giovanetti retired in 2005 from her position as a professor at the Faculty of the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FaE/UFMG). She was born in 1954 in the city of São João del-Rei, Minas Gerais. A social worker by training, a path that eventually led her into the field of education, she graduated in 1975 from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais (PUC/MG). She worked for five and a half years as a social worker for the evening program at Colégio Loyola, in Belo Horizonte. In 1987, she successfully passed a competitive examination to become a professor at FaE/UFMG, where she began teaching in the newly established Adult Education concentration. The program, now known as "Complementary Education in Youth and Adult Education", bears the lasting imprint of Maria Amélia's contributions. Her retirement followed eighteen years of work across undergraduate and graduate studies, outreach initiatives, and continuing education, much of it carried out through the Center for Youth and Adult Education (NEJA/FaE/UFMG), which she co-founded. She highlights two key aspects that serve as defining characteristics of EJA:

> The first is the social origin of the learners, that is, their belonging to the popular classes, and the second reference is the conception of education that guides a large portion of EJA programs, projects, and initiatives. This conception, by absorbing the legacy of popular education, makes its intentionality explicit: education as a process of human development aimed at contributing to the process of social change. Here, the emancipatory, liberating, and transgressive character of education is manifested (Giovanetti, 2006, p. 244).

- Timothy Denis Ireland is English and moved to Brazil in 1979, when he joined the postgraduate program in Education at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), at the time known as the Master's Program in Education (CME-*Curso de Mestrado em Educação*). He was born in 1948 in the town of Rochford, in the county of Essex, England. In 1971, he earned a degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Edinburgh, in Scotland. In Guarabira, in inland Paraíba, he began his engagement with the Popular Education Service (SEDUP) and provided counsel to an opposition group within the Construction and Furniture Workers' Union (SINTRICOM-*Sindicato dos Trabalhadores nas Indústrias da Construção*

[4] Our translation, author's emphasis.

e do Mobiliário) as they prepared for union elections, aiming to foster a labor organization more aligned with the workers' interests. Their victory in these elections led to the creation of the "Zé Peão" School Project (PEZP), a partnership between UFPB and SINTRICOM that lasted from 1990 to 2018. It was a school for construction workers, with classrooms set up directly on the construction sites where most of the laborers lived during the week. Timothy served as its coordinator for a long period, stepping away to head the Directorate of Youth and Adult Education (*Diretoria de Educação de Jovens e Adultos*-DEJA) within the Secretariat for Continuing Education, Literacy, and Diversity (SECAD-*Secretaria de Educação Continuada, Alfabetização e Diversidade*) at the Ministry of Education in 2005. As he points out:

> Brazil has a solid legal foundation for EJA as an equivalent form of education, with important provisions, including the obligation for states and municipalities to provide EJA free of charge within their educational systems and to respect the specific characteristics of this modality. While these are clearly important instruments for policy formulation, they are not sufficient to ensure that the law is translated into reality (Ireland, 2009, p. 52).

- Elza Maria Fonseca Falkembach was born in 1944 in the city of Três Corações, in the state of Minas Gerais. She studied Home Economics at the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV), graduating in 1966. Her first position in higher education was at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRRJ), where she held a special contract within the Home Economics program, a period during which she first encountered the work of Paulo Freire. She is a retired professor from the Regional University of Northwest Rio Grande do Sul (UNIJUÍ), where she worked for forty-four years. She serves as an advisor to the National Training School (ENFOC-*Escola Nacional de Formação*) of the National Confederation of Agricultural Workers (CONTAG-*Confederação Nacional dos Trabalhadores na Agricultura*), a space for reflection on rural trade union practice, as well as to the Program to Support the Systematization of Experiences (P*rograma de Apoio a Sistematização*-PAS) under the Council for Popular Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CEAAL). She is a member of the "Café com Paulo Freire" (Coffee with Paulo Freire) group in Garopaba, Santa Catarina, and belongs to the national network of such groups. In the context of the pandemic, Elza addressed the ethical, political, and pedagogical losses that weigh upon economic life, affecting material existence, survival, and the human being as such:

> These are times when we need history, to learn about a past that grounds us, enables us to form identifications, and creates space for the belief that it is possible to build a future. (...) With this awareness, it becomes possible to provide a foundation for resistance. It is, therefore, the role of Popular Education to help bring together individuals and the democratic forces that offer them a space for cohesion, a cohesion that is strategic in nature, yet firmly rooted in ethical principles.[5]

Jara and Falkembach (2013) highlight how important it is today, in the power relations that permeate the dynamics of globalized capitalism,

> (...) to reflect on certain characteristics and possibilities of Popular Education, as well as the mechanisms it has been developing to monitor and gain insight into its own practices and the contexts in which they take place, intervening incisively in both, and facilitating its aspirations toward "movement," "cultural creation," and "social transformation" (Jara; Falkembach, 2013, p. 151, emphasis in the original).

[5] Elza, online oral presentation on June 9, 2020, at the launch of Oscar Jara's book *A Educação Popular Latino-Americana: história e fundamentos éticos, políticos e pedagógicos*.

- Edna Castro de Oliveira was born in 1950 in the town of Santa Maria da Vitória, in the hinterlands of Bahia. She earned a degree in Pedagogy from the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) in 1974. As she recounts, her educational and professional journey was not a straight line; rather, it was interwoven with motherhood and family responsibilities. She recently retired as an associate professor at UFES, where she had worked since 1991. She was part of the research track on Education, Human Development, and Public Policy within the Graduate Program in Education at the UFES Center for Education (PPGE/CE/UFES) and served on the coordination team for the Center for Youth and Adult Education (NEJA/CE/UFES-*Núcleo de Educação de Jovens e Adultos*), where she worked on outreach projects as well as the initial and continuing education of educators in the field of EJA. She has been a member of the Espírito Santo Youth and Adult Education Forum since its inception in 1998. Throughout her life, she has been dedicated to various forms of activism, including work centered on ethnic-racial issues. In the preface to Pedagogy of Autonomy (Freire, 1996), she notes:

> Like other forms of knowledge, this one requires a constant, ongoing effort from the educator. Through a loving engagement with students, characterized by an attitude of curiosity and openness, the educator can foster a sense of agency in them, encouraging them to recognize themselves as socio-historical-cultural subjects in the act of knowing. Only in this way can the educator truly speak of respecting the dignity and autonomy of the learner [...]. One must learn to be consistent. A competent discourse is of no use if one's pedagogical practice remains impervious to change (Oliveira, 1996, p. 11).

- Sérgio Haddad was born in 1949 to Lebanese parents who met in Brazil during their youth. He earned degrees in Economics and Pedagogy in 1971. He is a senior researcher with the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq-*Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico*) and, until recently, served as a visiting professor in the graduate program at the University of Caxias do Sul (UCS). He is a retired professor from the graduate program at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP), an institution where Paulo Freire also worked. During his economics studies, he returned to the school he had attended, Colégio Santa Cruz, to teach and coordinate a new evening educational project for local workers: the school's e*nsino supletivo* program, now known as EJA at Colégio Santa Cruz[6], which he directed for 20 years. He also served as an advisor to the Ecumenical Center for Documentation and Information (CEDI-*Centro Ecumênico de Documentação e Informação*), which, in 1994, branched into four separate organizations: the Socio-Environmental Institute (ISA-*Instituto Sócio-Ambiental*); the Center for Studies, Work, and Society (NETS-*Núcleo de Estudos, Trabalho e Sociedade*); Koinonia; and Ação Educativa, the latter of which Sérgio joined as a coordinator, a role he continues to hold today. Ação Educativa stands as a vital hub for study and research on topics such as EJA, Popular Education, and Human Rights; it is the vantage point from which Sérgio explores the subject of education through various lenses. In his book "*O Educador: um perfil de Paulo Freire*" ("The

[6] According to Frochtengarten (2020), the replacement of the term "*ensino supletivo"* with "EJA" at Colégio Santa Cruz reflected a paradigm shift, following the establishment of Youth and Adult Education as a modality of Basic Education in Brazil, as set forth in the 1996 Law of Directives and Bases for National Education (LDB).

Educator: A Profile of Paulo Freire"), published in 2019, he provides insight into the history of EJA in Brazil, highlighting its particularly fertile period during the 1960s:

> Paulo gained significant visibility starting in 1963, when he spearheaded a literacy initiative in Angicos, Rio Grande do Norte, a project developed in collaboration with the team from the Cultural Extension Service (SEC) at the University of Recife [...]. Given the success and widespread attention the initiative garnered, Paulo was invited by the Ministry of Education and Culture to expand the program nationwide. He accepted the proposal and moved with his family to Brasília. In June 1963, he began working on the training of future coordinators for the literacy centers, which were to be established in virtually every state capital (Haddad, 2019, p. 17).

Given the interest expressed by these five individuals in participating in the research, we proceeded to analyze how their personal trajectories, as educators of educators, have contributed to the presence of Popular Education ideals within training programs for EJA educators.

INVESTIGATING THE TRAJECTORIES OF EJA TEACHER EDUCATORS

An analysis of their formative years during childhood and adolescence revealed that our participants were encouraged by family, religion, teachers, and friends to pursue certain paths, as highlighted by Maria Amélia, who speaks of her admiration for her father: "That consistency of his, and I think, deep down, it was his humanity that really touched me" (Maria Amélia, research archive).

Timothy recalls a friar being welcomed into his parents' home, an experience that sparked his interest in other cultures: "He had worked in Africa and shared some stories from his time there, I don't know, I think that was, in a way, one of the germs, one of the seeds" (Timothy, research archive).

Elza highlights her grandmother's questions regarding social relations: "This God, for whom she had a certain respect, did not know how to divide things up fairly (...). These are events that left a mark on my life and converged to shape the political choices I made along the way" (Elza, research archive).

Edna recalls her childhood in the hinterlands of Bahia, where she observed her father's example as he fought for his community: "Back then, you didn't get paid to be a politician, there was no remuneration. He engaged in politics out of a sense of calling, as I see it, because he was driven by the idea of the common good for the population. He always championed collective causes" (Edna, research archive).

Sérgio recounts his mother's efforts to secure a scholarship for him at an elite school, where he began to observe social disparities firsthand: "My father passed away very early on; my mother managed to get that scholarship, and I remained at the school" (Sérgio, research archive).

Another influence on their early development was the religious background of their families, which shaped their first social experiences. One notable example comes from Maria Amélia's recollection of her participation in the Christian Youth Course (CJC): "It was the first time I encountered the term 'income concentration' (...). By joining this group of young people, I gained a new source of reflection on life, as well as new knowledge and information about Brazil" (Maria Amélia, research archive).

Similarly, Elza describes her involvement in the Catholic Student Youth (JEC), the work they carried out, and her first instances of challenging the established order: "These were events that shaped

my worldview and my place in the world. In other words, it showed me that it is possible to dissent, just as my father, my grandmother, and others had done" (Elza, research archive).

Sérgio took advantage of the opportunities that arose through Colégio Santa Cruz, a Catholic institution run by priests: "That was when I got involved in a lot of things the school offered, activities that were largely focused on social outreach, and I began to develop a commitment to the poorest segments of the population" (Sérgio, research archive).

Timothy and Edna experienced a form of religiosity linked to their parents' leadership roles within the Protestant church. Timothy notes: "When your father is a pastor, the two spheres are somewhat intertwined; I believe I was influenced by certain values from the Church" (Timothy, research archive). For Edna, the connection between family and church went beyond her father's role as a church elder; it continued when she met the seminary student whom she would later marry: "I like to say that, as a pastor, he led me down a different path, 'led me astray,' in the sense that my way of interpreting reality changed. The Seminário Presbiteriano do Centenário, where he studied, had a progressive orientation" (Edna, research archive).

These memories reveal the genesis of a political engagement that we consider fundamental to one's initiation into collective mobilizations, as evidenced by statements of involvement in addressing urban issues, organizing Christmas campaigns, providing aid to the unhoused, and supporting the community at large, experiences that left a lasting impact: "That introduced me to another world" (Sérgio, research archive).

The earliest memories shared by our interlocutors, drawn from their childhood and adolescence, point to a connection that we constantly forge between the past, the present, and the future. According to their narratives, these foundational experiences played a key role in their future decision-making, in which the choice to stand with the oppressed went far beyond simply "ending up in EJA". It resonates with the dedication found in Pedagogy of the Oppressed: "To the ragged of the world, and to those who discover themselves in them, and, in discovering themselves, suffer with them, but, above all, struggle alongside them" (Freire, 2014, p. 05).

The undergraduate and graduate programs chosen by the interviewees reflect their commitment to youth and adults engaged in struggles for emancipation. Much like the educational trajectories of many educators in the field of EJA, four of the five individuals interviewed did not encounter the necessary theoretical and practical elements within their initial curricula to prepare them for professional practice in EJA. With the exception of one participant (Maria Amélia), who, during her undergraduate studies, engaged with authors whose work addressed the specificities of EJA, the others only gained exposure to this field during their master's and doctoral studies.

Maria Amélia completed her master's degree at the Catholic University of Louvain, in Belgium. Seeking to connect this with her prior experience as a social worker for the evening program at Colégio Loyola, she aimed to understand the historical period in Brazil between 1974 and 1979: "What kind of historical context allowed for an experience like the one at Loyola, so participatory, so questioning, to exist, despite such a harsh dictatorship and such intense repression?" (Maria Amélia, research archive). Her doctoral studies, undertaken at the same university, consisted of an initial theoretical phase, conducted while she was still living in Belgium, and a second, empirical phase carried out in Brazil during the post-military dictatorship period, focusing on urban social movements: "I conducted a case study at a school in the Lindéia neighborhood, along with nine life histories of teachers

and workers associated with the school, tracing their paths within the neighborhood and the very creation of the school" (Maria Amélia, research archive).

Timothy pursued his master's and doctoral degrees in Europe, beginning his postgraduate studies at the University of Manchester with a specialization in Adult Education. For his master's degree, he conducted research on the work of Ettore Gelpi, who "was responsible at the time for lifelong education at UNESCO in Paris" (Timothy, research archive). According to Timothy, Gelpi and Freire knew each other and shared a common perspective in their thinking. For his doctorate, also at the University of Manchester, under the supervision of Ralph Ruddock, Timothy developed his thesis based on the experience he had gained at SEDUP with the "Zé Pião"[7] group: "I began following this group closely; we would hold at least one meeting a week, and I also took part in many of their other activities, etc." (Timothy, research archive).

Elza completed her master's degree in Sociology and Rural Economics at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) in Porto Alegre. She sought to understand the housing problems faced by workers of rural origin in urban environments. For her doctoral studies at the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC), she researched the phenomenon of human individuation, drawing on an experience she had previously observed within a collective of the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST): "I worked specifically with the MST, focusing on the themes of socialization and individuation, based on an experience we developed at the Júlio de Castilhos settlement" (Elza, research archive).

Edna pursued her master's degree at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), drawing on her experience with an adult literacy group coordinated by her partner, Admardo Serafim de Oliveira: "The group initially worked with ten schools within the state public school system, and my role was to provide support in the area of language studies" (Edna, research archive). Her interest in Emília Ferreiro's sociolinguistic studies led to her master's thesis project, in which she proposed a revision of Paulo Freire's approach to adult literacy. Freire not only served on her thesis defense committee but later invited her to write the preface to his book *Pedagogia da Autonomia* (Freire, 1996). During her doctoral studies at the Fluminense Federal University (UFF), under the supervision of Professor Osmar Fávero, Edna focused on the preparation of educators working within the landless workers' movement, drawing on her involvement in the National Program for Education in Agrarian Reform (PRONERA), which she coordinated at UFES: "Then came the call for PRONERA, literacy for youth and adults, addressing the clear demand for popular education that existed at the time. We took on this initiative, continuing our work in educator training" (Edna, research archive).

Drawing on the experience he gained in the the *ensino supletivo* program at Colégio Santa Cruz, Sérgio pursued his master's and doctoral degrees at the University of São Paulo (USP) under the supervision of Professor Celso Beisiegel. His master's research focused on Popular Education, while his doctoral work examined adult education in Brazil between 1964 and 1985: "It was a study on how *ensino supletivo* was being implemented in Brazil. I visited several state capitals, almost all of them, in fact, gathered data, and wrote a highly descriptive thesis" (Sérgio, research archive).

[7] According to the commemorative publication *Sintricom 80 anos*, the project was initially named "Zé Pião" because of the high turnover among construction and furniture industry workers, drawing an analogy with a traditional wooden spinning top that spins when thrown to the ground (Revista Sintricom 80 anos, 2014). The group was later renamed "Zé Peão," referring to workers.

The entry of these five individuals into graduate studies marked the beginning of their careers as researchers in the field of EJA, an area of inquiry deeply connected to their professional practice. Drawing Paulo Freire's (1996, pp. 43–44) concept of praxis, we understand sound thinking as a dynamic movement between action and reflection on that action: "It is by critically reflecting on the practice of today or yesterday that one can improve the practice of tomorrow. Theoretical discourse itself, which is necessary for critical reflection, must be so concrete that it almost merges with practice" (Freire, 1996, pp. 43–44).

In studying the political engagement of our interlocutors, we observed that as they became more involved in activism, they expanded their opportunities for dialogue with individuals experiencing oppression. In doing so, they joined forces with a wide range of people, active participants in social movements during the 1970s and 1980s, who, driven by a desire for the country's democratization, were committed to the struggle for the democratization of the right to education, as Sposito (2000, p. 74) points out:

> During the social struggles against the dictatorship and the search for paths toward a transition, the idea emerged, during this period, that civil society, especially organized groups and movements, should participate in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of public policies, particularly in the social sphere.

Drawing on memories of her involvement in the Christian Youth Course, Maria Amélia highlights how she learned about Freirean dialogicity during an internship in the Vale do Jequitinhonha, where she assisted Renato Hilário in coordinating work with the impoverished community in that region: "He was careful not to make it explicit, he would not cite it, he'd just let it be, but the substance of it was plain to see! (...) All of this is Paulo Freire" (Maria Amélia, research archive).

Timothy recalls his political initiation in Spain under the Franco military regime, where he accompanied university students involved in the resistance movement. He brought with him lessons that would later lead him to dive "headfirst" into the rural movement in Guarabira: "The rural union truly became a form of resistance, both against what was happening in the countryside and against the military regime" (Timothy, research archive). As a professor at UFPB, he began providing counsel to the newly established SEDUP, an experience through which he highlights the formative influence of figures such as Dom Marcelo Carvalheira and the popular educator Maria Valéria Rezende: "SEDUP was created with the intention of providing support to the Rural Trade Union Movement, women's movements, and the Church's more education-oriented activities" (Timothy, research archive).

Elza highlights her involvement as a student at the Federal University of Viçosa (UFV) during the period leading up to the military dictatorship: "I became part of an initiative based on a worker-student-peasant alliance, work that we carried out among the peasants on the outskirts of Viçosa" (Elza, research archive). She identifies *Ação Popular* (Popular Action) as the group she belonged to, an organization that, at the time, also brought together members of the Catholic University Youth (JUC) and the Communist Party of Brazil (PCdoB). Following the 1964 coup, while still an undergraduate, Elza remained active in these movements, a commitment she continued during her time as a professor at UFRRJ and while pursuing her master's degree at UFRGS. Eventually, facing intense persecution by the dictatorship, she moved to Ijuí, in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, to live with her partner. Regarding her time in Ijuí, she emphasized the founding of UNIJUÍ, an institution where she would go on to work for

44 years: "What gave rise to university education in Ijuí was community development, a form of grassroots education established through the efforts of the Capuchin friars" (Elza, research archive).

Edna highlights university outreach as a guiding principle in her efforts to respond to community needs: "The request that reached the university from social movements was for a multidisciplinary project, an initiative for which our group was approached, given the results we had achieved through our ongoing work" (Edna, research archive). From that point on, she remained at the forefront of the dialogue between the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) and the surrounding community through the activities of the NEJA, whether in the development of the PRONERA program or through the initiatives of the Youth and Adult Education Forum of Espírito Santo. Edna engaged in an important discussion regarding her own trajectory as a Black woman and educator, shedding light on the gaps and challenges she encountered. She notes that her presence, along with that of another Black colleague, within the graduate program brought about significant shifts: "We began to stir up these issues within the Center and within the Program, specifically regarding the Diversity track. This is, in part, the history we carry, a history marked by experiences that often remain silenced" (Edna, research archive).

Sérgio recalls his participation in street protests in São Paulo during his first year of college, in the midst of the military regime: "Spending 1968 out on the streets was a process, let's put it this way: that was when I gained political consciousness regarding the dictatorship, clashing with police in the streets and with students from Mackenzie" (Sérgio, research archive). Later, while serving as coordinator of e*nsino supletivo* at Colégio Santa Cruz, he linked his work there with his activities at CEDI, bringing his experience in schooling to social movements: "That was when I developed the *Seringueiro* project; I went to work with rubber tappers in Acre, with riverine communities along the Solimões River in the Amazon, on the outskirts of São Paulo, and with social movements in the city's East Zone" (Sérgio, research archive).

These statements suggest that political engagement was a vital pulse in these individuals' lives, a rhythm felt as early as childhood and adolescence, which later strengthened during their youth, and one that they would carry forward throughout their careers as teacher educators, as we shall analyze next.

Maria Amélia recounts her introduction to adult education during her adolescence, when she served as a volunteer for a project linked to a church in São João del-Rei, an experience that marked the beginning of her career in the field. The development of her identity as an educator of educators[8], which began when she joined the Faculty of Education at the Federal University of Minas Gerais (FaE/UFMG) in 1987, following a competitive selection process for a teaching position in the Adult Education concentration, was, for her, a form of preparation for a specific professional role: "These are future educators, some will become school principals, others coordinators, or teachers of youth and adults, but they already occupy the role of 'educator,' and I am an educator of these educators" (Maria Amélia, research archive). Her narrative explores this identity as an educator of educators, not only within that specific academic specialization but also through continuing education initiatives in partnership with municipal and state departments, graduate-level teaching, individual and collaborative research, professional events, and the teacher education component of the Youth and Adult Basic Education

[8] Regarding the formation of the professional identity of those who train educators working in EJA, see Cunha Júnior and Soares (2024).

Project (PROEF): "Another element that reflects our understanding of educator preparation is the integration of teaching, research, and outreach. Teaching took place through the specialization program; research was conducted via master's-level supervision and the individual research projects of each faculty member; and outreach was carried out through PROEF" (Maria Amélia, research archive).

Timothy reflects on the development of his identity as a teacher educator, noting that he had not originally envisioned an academic career: "Deep down, what I most wanted to do was what is known in English-language literature as community development work. It was akin to being a popular educator, working within a less formal sphere" (Timothy, research archive). His statement sheds light on a conception of the educator that bridges the gap between the university and the field of Popular Education. Even while affiliated with academia, his various initiatives consistently sought out non-formal spaces where emancipatory education could unfold creatively, breaking away from traditional teaching paradigms and reinventing, or broadening, the very notion of education: "The focus was very clear to us: it was a commitment to people who needed to learn to read and write, not only because this was an essential tool for their lives as citizens, but also because it offered the possibility of expanding their horizons" (Timothy, research archive).

In reflecting on her understanding of her role as a teacher educator, rooted in rural life and a commitment to the struggles of peasant communities, Elza reveals a key aspect of how her identity was formed. She highlights the role of "Permanent Education" (later referred to as Popular Education), the influence of Paulo Freire's thought, and the significance of the work Extension or Communication? (Freire, 1977) within the rural context: "Back then, we were already working with Freire, focusing on the relationship between the knowledge held by workers and the knowledge from the university, which didn't just 'deliver' knowledge, but rather engaged in a process of communication, in a truly participatory way" (Elza, research archive).

Edna shared her perspective on extension work by reflecting on her history at UFES, where she was involved in the extension project "Literacy and Educator Preparation through Youth and Adult Education Practice", even before she was officially affiliated with the institution. We can observe the development of her identity as a teacher educator through the battles fought to secure a place for EJA within the institution. Drawing on her background with the MST, Edna recounted one of the victories achieved: "We occupied the space, literally, in the same way the MST carries out occupations (…), and we are still there today; no one has removed us. It serves as a space for training, gatherings, and meetings, and classes are held in those two rooms at the Center for Education" (Edna, research archive).

Finally, Sérgio recounts a successful innovation in the schooling of youth and adults, an approach that broke away from the traditional models of *ensino supletivo* then in place, based on a concept of continuing education that he shared with the team of educators at Colégio Santa Cruz. He also describes his trajectory as a teacher educator working outside the university setting to meet the demands of social movements: "It was this very group that carried out the work with the rubber tappers (*seringueiros*), that designed the educational handbook with the riverine communities (*ribeirinhos*), and that conducted training sessions here on the outskirts of São Paulo (...). Through the experience at Santa Cruz, the group became part of CEDI" (Sérgio, research archive).

THE PREPARATION OF EJA EDUCATORS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TEACHER EDUCATORS: POPULAR EDUCATION AS A GUIDING FRAMEWORK

By examining the autobiographical accounts of these five key figures in educator preparation, we identified a body of knowledge that enabled us to organize the essential elements of EJA educator preparation. The paths taken during childhood and adolescence, formative experiences during undergraduate and postgraduate studies, political engagement, and an alignment with Popular Education, combined with their work as trainers of other educators, provided us with insights into the training required for working in EJA.

Table 1 was developed based on an inquiry into what these individuals consider necessary for high-quality training in the field of EJA:

Table 1 – Elements necessary for the training of EJA educators

Participant	**Essential elements for EJA educator preparation**				
Maria Amélia	Ability to build relationships.	Recognition of the contradictions within the structure of society.	Questioning established assumptions to make room for new understandings.	Reflection; self-awareness; action–reflection as a basis for moving forward.	Experience in Popular Education.
Timothy	Political commitment.	Mastery of subject matter and methodological understanding.	Ability to build relationships.	A Popular Education perspective.	Development of autonomous, critical, and creative thinking.
Elza	Understanding the context of educator preparation.	Developing critical and creative practice; systematizing experiences to communicate what has been learned.	contradictions and enhance education.Getting to know and welcoming learners in order to identify contradictions and strengthen educational practice.	Education.A process of developing critical consciousness; the legacy of Popular Education.	Content mastery and appropriate methodology.
Edna	point of view.Theoretical coherence; sociological, philosophical,	Understanding young people, adults, and older adults as learners.	Political interpretation of contexts.	The distinctive characteristics of EJA.	A grounding in linguistics; study of the foundations of language.

	and historical perspectives.				
Sérgio	Dialogicity in the Freirean proposal.	Learning through practice in EJA.	Foundational training in the specific field of each area, along with the reading and in-depth study of theorists in the field of Youth and Adult Education (EJA).	Understanding learners' particular circumstances and dynamics in order to challenge generalized standards.	Understanding the political moment.

Source: research archive

In the table, shades of pink highlight the perspective of Popular Education, which is considered a key theme in the pursuit of dignity and social justice. In this context, concepts such as "contradictions," "political commitment," "understanding the context," and "dialogicity" define the tone of this discussion.

Shades of yellow highlight the need for mastery of subject matter and the use of methodologies appropriate to the specific needs of young, adult, and elderly learners.

Shades of green highlight human relationships, the process of getting to know one another, and the building of bonds within the educational process, whether between a teacher educator and an educator or between an educator and a learner.

Finally, the shades of blue highlight a concern for the educator in training, encouraging them to look inward and awaken a capacity for reflection, creativity, and critical thinking.

As we can see, the themes raised by our interviewees are in alignment; that is, they are closer to one another than they are distinct. Although each teacher educator offered a different perspective on their work, there was, overall, a convergence of ideas, which allows us to identify specific characteristics inherent to the training of educators in the field of EJA.

In other words, through the use of an autobiographical research methodology, it was possible to outline certain specificities regarding the training of EJA educators. This points to a field that must affirm its commitment to struggle, recognize its rich history and preserve its legacy that should remain central to the preparation of professionals working in this area. Therefore, based on this inquiry, we can highlight four principles that should be present in the training of EJA educators: 1. the perspective of Popular Education; 2. mastery of the content and methodology specific to the field; 3. the development of human relationships grounded in the recognition of the "other"; and 4. reflection as a formative process.

The perspective of Popular Education stands out as the most frequent principle, appearing nine times. This finding can be understood in close connection to the life trajectories of our interlocutors, who have participated in concrete Popular Education experiences throughout their lives. Given the intensity with which they discuss these experiences, we can also analyze these shades of pink from a qualitative perspective: the pursuit of dignity and social justice that permeates their reflections.

Situating Popular Education within this rich, diverse, and historically significant context helps us understand the meanings our interlocutors attribute to this fundamental element in the training of educators working in EJA.

> Popular education has been, and continues to be, a sequence of ideas and proposals for a style of education in which such bonds are re-established at different moments in history. Its core vocation lies in a reciprocal commitment, a two-way exchange, within pedagogical relationships of a political nature, carried out through cultural work that engages individuals from the popular classes. These individuals are understood not as late-arriving beneficiaries of a "service," but as emerging protagonists in a "process" (Brandão, 2002, pp. 141–142; author's emphasis).

Understanding the perspective of Popular Education, as reflected in the teacher educators' trajectories and their view on the essential elements for training educators in the field of EJA, is significant because, as Jara (2020, p. 26) notes, "most of those who produce thought within Popular Education are, in fact, its practitioners."

The second principle, mastery of the content and methodology specific to the field, highlights a concern among teacher educators that aligns with ideas Freire developed in *Pedagogia da autonomia: saberes necessários à prática educativa* (Pedagogy of Autonomy: Knowledge Necessary for Educational Practice). Freire argues that one of an educator's primary tasks is "to work with learners on the methodical rigor with which they must 'approach' objects of knowledge" (Freire, 1996, p. 11, emphasis in the original). In other words, he refers to technical-scientific competence, combined with a sense of care and affection within educational relationships, as a means to create opportunities for the production of knowledge with autonomy and critical awareness: "Epistemological curiosity, becoming methodically 'more rigorous' in its approach to an object, lends greater precision to its findings" (Freire, 1996, p. 34, emphasis in the original).

Regarding the third principle, the construction of human relationships founded upon the recognition of the other, we observe our interlocutors engaging, once again, in a dialogue with Freire (1996, p. 25), who states: "There is no teaching without learning; the two explain each other, and the individuals involved, despite the differences that characterize them, are never reduced to the status of an object in relation to one another. Those who teach learn by teaching, and those who learn teach by learning."

In relation to this connection, which is indispensable to educational practice, our teacher educators emphasize the importance of connectivity with others, much as Jara (2020, p. 25) has noted:

> This model [referring to the new educational paradigm of Popular Education] is grounded, primarily, in a philosophy of educational praxis, understood as a political-pedagogical process centered on the human being as a historical subject, a creator and transformer who is socially constructed through relationships with other human beings and with the world.

In the final principle, reflection as a formative process, we observe that those who facilitate training emphasize the need for educators to examine themselves, thereby developing self-awareness and self-criticism in their pursuit of autonomous and creative work.

In his work "Cultural Action for Freedom and Other Writings", Freire (1982, p. 139) posits that developing critical consciousness is essential to action aimed at transforming reality: "There is no conscientization outside praxis, outside of the unity of theory and practice, reflection and action." According to him, "the unity between practice and theory, action and reflection, subjectivity and objectivity, comes to be understood, in the correct terms, through the analysis of the aforementioned

relationships" (Freire, 1982, p. 49). Thus, through reflection on their practice, educators and learners construct a new reality, a society characterized by justice and dignity, that stands not against, but in favor of, the oppressed classes.

Finally, we can consider that these four systematized principles are interconnected, given that the perspective of Popular Education, as a process of struggle for the advancement of the popular classes, entails respect for the individuals involved, achieved through mastery of relevant content and methodology, the nature of the relationships established, and the practice of self-criticism to move forward.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

How can the past nourish the present? Or, as Soares (2003, p. 126) suggests, the past can introduce us to experiences that "breathe new life into, and challenge, the traditional forms found in formal education systems." Guided by this perspective, we opened the treasure chest of stories regarding Youth and Adult Education (EJA), drawing on the memories of a generation that began working in educator preparation during the 1970s and 1980s. By asking questions about when, where, and how this training took place, we were able to gain insight into how such professional development should be structured to develop an educational approach that seeks to overcome inequalities and ensure the meaningful participation of those involved.

An analysis of the responses of the five teacher educators selected for this study enabled us to identify specific characteristics of EJA educator preparation. These were organized into principles that, according to these participants, should underpin the preparation process.

Listening to the accounts of these five prominent figures in the preparation of EJA educators in Brazil helped us understand how their longstanding engagement with Popular Education, both in their own education and in their professional practice, encouraged the incorporation of these principles into the preparation of EJA professionals.

It can be said that the integration of the philosophy of Popular Education into the various training initiatives for educators in EJA is the result of the work of a group of individuals, represented here by our interlocutors, who built upon their own experiences in the field and became proponents of these principles. They inherited this tradition and drew inspiration from it. Consequently, those shaped by the experience of Popular Education advocate for a training approach grounded in its core tenets, helping to sustain these ideals in EJA educator preparation so that this legacy supports high-quality, transformative education.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The materials underlying this study are included in the manuscript.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 – Conducted the research, actively participated in data analysis, and revised the final manuscript.
Author 2 – Supervised the research, actively participated in data analysis, and revised the final manuscript.
Author 3 – Co-supervised the research, actively participated in data analysis, and revised the final manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to this article.