

SECTION: ARTICLES

Training of graduate students for teaching in higher education: a specific scientific field of knowledge¹

Formação do pós-graduando para docência na educação superior: um campo científico específico de saberes

Formación de los estudiantes de posgrado para docencia en la educación superior: un campo del conocimiento científico específico

Yuna Lélis Beleza Lopes², Márcia Mendes Ruiz Cantano³,
Noeli Prestes Padilha Rivas⁴

ABSTRACT

This essay aims to reflect on the training of future university professors – in this case, postgraduate students – and the construction of spaces that guarantee the didactic-pedagogical training of these subjects. There are specificities to teaching and, when they are unknown or denied, they somehow affect the training of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Constructed collectively, this work results from an investigative attitude, readings and reflections around the relevance of adequate training of postgraduate students, who may be future higher education teachers, and around whether the teachers who train these students have knowledge of the specificities and knowledge for teaching work. Next, the issue of specific teaching knowledge that goes beyond technical instrumentality is explored. With

¹ The authors were responsible for translating this article into English.

² Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brasil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6782-9751>. Email: yuna.lobes@usp.br

³ Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brasil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9641-597X>. Email: marcia.cantano@usp.br

⁴ Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Ribeirão Preto, SP, Brasil.

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9990-6640>. Email: noerivas@ffclrp.usp.br

brief considerations, the relevance of public and institutional training policies for university teaching is highlighted, since the legislation does not recommend specifically pedagogical knowledge for teaching in Higher Education. Furthermore, we advocate teaching in the academic environment that uses alternatives that value the complexity of teaching, always intentional. It is recognized that there is a scientific field of knowledge to think responsibly about the current training of postgraduate students, future university professors.

Keywords: training for teaching; didactic-pedagogical training; specific knowledge; university teaching.

RESUMO

Este ensaio visa reflexões destinadas à formação do futuro docente universitário – no caso, estudantes de pós-graduação – e à construção de espaços que garantam a formação didático-pedagógica desses sujeitos. Existem especificidades para o exercício da docência e, quando são desconhecidas ou negadas, afetam de algum modo a formação dos estudantes de graduação e de pós-graduação. Construído coletivamente, este trabalho resulta de atitude investigativa, leituras e reflexões em torno da relevância da formação adequada dos pós-graduandos, que poderão ser futuros professores do ensino superior, e em torno de se os docentes formadores desses estudantes têm conhecimento das especificidades e saberes para o trabalho docente. De modo introdutório, salienta a respeito dos processos de formação pedagógica aos alunos de pós-graduação para a docência universitária. Na sequência, explora-se a questão dos saberes específicos da docência que superam a instrumentalidade técnica. Com breves considerações, destaca-se a relevância de políticas públicas e institucionais de formação para a docência universitária, uma vez que a legislação não preconiza os conhecimentos especificadamente pedagógicos para o exercício docente no ensino superior. Ainda, advoga-se por uma atuação docente no ambiente acadêmico que se instrumentalize de alternativas que valorizem a complexidade da ação docente, sempre intencional. Reconhece-se a existência de um campo científico de saberes pensar responsavelmente a formação atual dos pós-graduandos, futuros professores universitários.

Palavras-chave: formação para a docência; formação didático-pedagógica; saberes específicos; docência universitária.

RESUMEN

Este ensayo pretende reflexionar sobre la formación de los futuros profesores universitarios – en este caso, estudiantes de posgrado – y la construcción de espacios que garanticen la formación didáctico-pedagógica de estas materias. Hay especificidades en la docencia y, cuando se desconocen o se niegan, afectan de alguna manera la formación de estudiantes de pregrado y posgrado. Construido colectivamente, este trabajo resulta de una actitud

investigativa, lecturas y reflexiones en torno a la pertinencia de una formación adecuada de los estudiantes de posgrado, que podrían ser futuros profesores de educación superior, y en torno a si los docentes que forman a estos estudiantes son conscientes de las especificidades y conocimientos para el trabajo docente. De manera introductoria, destaca los procesos de formación pedagógica de estudiantes de posgrado para la docencia universitaria. A continuación, se explora la cuestión de los conocimientos docentes específicos que van más allá de la instrumentalidad técnica. Con breves consideraciones, se destaca la relevancia de las políticas públicas e institucionales de formación para la docencia universitaria, toda vez que la legislación no recomienda conocimientos específicamente pedagógicos para la docencia en la Educación Superior. Además, abogamos por una enseñanza en el entorno académico que utilice alternativas que valoren la complejidad de la enseñanza, siempre intencional. Se reconoce la existencia de un campo científico del conocimiento y pensar responsablemente en la formación actual de los estudiantes de posgrado, futuros profesores universitarios.

Palabras clave: formación para la docencia; formación didáctico-pedagógica; conocimiento específico; docencia universitaria.

INTRODUCTION

This text is the result of the reflection on an experience⁵ carried out within the scope of postgraduate studies and is configured based on the theme of university pedagogy — field of training for teaching in higher education and the pedagogical bases that constitute this professional activity. Therefore, it is considered pertinent to bring up the topic in question, “[...] to discuss how the university professor is trained to work simultaneously in research and knowledge production activities and in teaching activities” (Almeida; Pimenta, 2011, p. 20). It is worth mentioning that the intention is not to work on the differences between the epistemological field of pedagogy, in which it also names an undergraduate/degree course, and that of teaching, given that the focus is directed towards the relevance and need for didactic-pedagogical training of university professors.

The lack of professional knowledge for university professors to work with, as well as the lack of coordinated policies for the sector, have an impact on the quality of the training processes being developed in higher education courses. It is assumed, then, that professors with adequate pedagogical training can contribute to highlighting the social function of the university, given that they deal with the complexity of the training processes, in addition to understanding that the asymmetries resulting from the principles and foundations in higher

⁵ Essay based on performance as postgraduate students and university professor.

education convert profitable spaces into market logics, which end up imposing restrictions on the training of students and on the teaching professionalism itself.

The aim is to underline the importance and need for pedagogical training processes for postgraduate students for university teaching, since this level of education, in theory, trains professors to work in higher education, but programs for this purpose have few moments of in-depth study in teaching (Corrêa *et al.*, 2011).

In this sense, there is a (provocative) question about how harmful it is for the teaching process (Anastasiou; Alves, 2015) and, therefore, for the quality of higher education, the lack of knowledge or denial, on the part of university professors, of the multiple dimensions assumed in teaching. According to Cunha (2010), it is the multiple types of knowledge that need to be appropriated and understood in their relationships.

Almeida and Pimenta (2014) consider that university teaching is a complex field of action that requires a set of activities that presuppose elements of various natures. And Corrêa *et al.* (2011) highlight that the theoretical-conceptual elements that support university teaching are not recognized by most teachers, “because recognizing them means making our own limits explicit. [...] it does not only refer to individual responsibilities, but also to political-institutional responsibilities” (p. 79).

The frequent lack of preparation of higher education professors means that they are sometimes unaware of, for example, the place of the field of didactics and curriculum⁶ in the construction of the course's political-pedagogical project; the importance of collective, cooperative and collaborative work; the knowledge related to the didactic organization of the class (methodological procedures, teaching resources and strategies, evaluation processes, among others). And this lack of knowledge has implications for teaching and learning.

The authors who support this reflection were selected based on their connection to the theme, such as Almeida and Pimenta (2014); Cunha (2018); Saviani (1996); and Zabalza (2007), who underline, among other issues, the necessary reconfiguration of teaching and teaching and learning practices in the face of paradigmatic changes that permeate the entire educational process. In the article *University pedagogy – Valuing education and teaching at university*, Almeida and Pimenta point to “the importance of the institutional rooting of pedagogical training policies for university professors; their inclusion in the institutional budget; the diversity of training actions; and the valorization of the scientific production of professors on education” (Almeida; Pimenta, 2014, p. 7) and consider that teacher training

⁶ Here understood as a socio-historical-cultural artifact (historical because mutable; social because constructed). And its conceptualization is mediated by conceptions of society, education, culture (Tavano; Almeida, 2018).

needs to be nested within a perspective of professional development in which initial training is the beginning of a continuous process.

In *Teaching in Higher Education: professorality under construction*, Cunha (2018) discusses the conditions of teaching, especially in higher education, and analyzes the professional identity of professors as a prerequisite for professorality, profession in action that mobilizes knowledge specific to the profession, as well as “defends the responsibility of institutions and public policies in the production of teaching sustained by professional and collective training, in the context of a university pedagogy that responds to emerging demands” (p. 6).

Saviani (1996), in the text *Knowledge involved in the training of the educator*, addresses the nature of education, which requires an understanding of human nature, and the knowledge that results from it, attitudinal; critical-contextual; specific; pedagogical; didactic-curricular. The author also deals with the educational relationship as a mediating social practice (pedagogical work) of the global social practice in which the educational problem is analyzed as a starting and ending point, in which the different areas of knowledge such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, among others, are collaborators for the study, but not determinants. In this sense, it is educational knowledge that determines the content of educators’ training.

Zabalza (2007) discusses the development of university teaching in *University professors*, which requires specific knowledge based on three interrelated dimensions⁷ that define the teaching role, namely professional, personal and administrative. From the author's perspective, development means growing in rationality — knowing what is done and why it is done; in specialty — knowing why some choices are more appropriate than others in certain circumstances; and in effectiveness. Furthermore, he considers teaching as a complex, specialized professional activity, in the sense of scientific and pedagogical qualification. Using the term professionalization, he argues that teaching demands specific knowledge and training for its performance, as well as emphasizes basic guidelines for the development of the university professor, the transition from teaching based on education to teaching that also incorporates learning; the inclusion of new didactic and formative models within the scope of technologies; the integration of interdisciplinary internships configuring curricular innovations and a sense of pedagogical praxis; and the pursuit of quality through the review of teaching practices and the institutional mission of the university.

In the next section, through theoretical foundations, the limits of the absence or precarious training for teaching in higher education and its implications are problematized, as well as a summary of the field of university pedagogy is presented. At the end of the summary, brief

⁷ Almeida and Pimenta (2014) work with the dimensions: professional, personal and organizational.

considerations advocate for another logic of teaching practice, with adequate pedagogical training and institutionalization of university pedagogy.

PEDAGOGICAL (DE)FORMATION OF THE UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR

This work, constructed collectively, results from an investigative attitude, readings and reflections around the relevance of the field of university pedagogy, especially for the adequate training of postgraduate students, future higher education teachers. If the professors who train these students are aware of the specificities and knowledge required for teaching work, this will be reflected in some way in their performance. University professors who, through omission or lack of knowledge, do not assume their role as trainers of new professors, “(de)form” something that is in process or that could be improved. The choice of the term “deform” is not derogatory or prejudiced, but rather to cause strangeness and promote debate. “Deformation” in the sense of a formation that may be deficient or insufficient. Hence the need for spaces and centers of pedagogical support.

The university reflects in a determined manner the structure and way in which society functions as a whole, in multiple determinations. From this perspective, higher education is affected by economic, political and social crises – and these tribulations reverberate in teaching work and in the meanings of education. In a time of intense globalization (Chauí, 2003), undergraduate studies and teaching/training are overlooked by a productivist logic, which has repercussions on the conception⁸ of education and teaching at the university.

This productivist and competitive logic is associated with the phenomenon of precariousness and intensification of teaching work in higher education institutions, the instrumentalization of educational policies for market purposes and with the political-economic transformations underlying the new logic of capitalist accumulation (Fávero; Bechi, 2020). In the context of neoliberal reforms, education professionals must offer their labor in exchange for a salary based on their “productivity” and be subject to different forms of hiring. To remain in the market, teachers must adapt to the demands of a flexible work model and the deregulation of labor relations. On the other hand, it is considered that:

The university is an educational institution whose purpose is the permanent exercise of criticism, which is supported by research, teaching and extension, that is, the production of knowledge based on the problematization of historically produced knowledge and its results in the construction of human society and the new challenges and demands that it poses (Almeida; Pimenta, 2011, p. 21; 2014, p. 8).

⁸ If this conception is not neutral, “it is necessary to analyze it from a perspective that distances itself from the merely technical conception” (Cunha, 2006, p. 20).

Thinking about education as a human element, and a social practice, refers to the importance of a critical reading of reality and the role of the educator in line with that of a public intellectual (Apple, 2017), in other words, the role of an activist, critic, engaged, committed, with counter-hegemonic actions — confronting the dominant, instrumentalized model — and who assumes teaching work as a concrete possibility of mediation.

When addressing the training processes related to knowing how to be a professor in a complex university, understand “(...) each person's teaching as an expression of scientific, ethical and political commitments to undergraduate teaching in a public university” (Almeida; Pimenta, 2014, p. 17). Cunha (2018) assumes teaching as a complex action in which disciplinary, cultural, affective, ethical, methodological, psychological, sociological and political knowledge converge.

In view of this context, since education is a social right, reflecting on the appreciation of the professional, the profession and the professional development of university professors is relevant for the success of human, not just professional, training that fosters critical thinking among higher education students. Teaching is considered to be an activity that consists of specific knowledge of the pedagogical area knowledge, closely linked to theory and creative reflection (Almeida; Pimenta, 2014).

The Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (LDBEN nº 9.394/1996), in its article 66 defines: “Preparation for the exercise of higher education teaching will be done at the postgraduate level, primarily in master's and doctorate programs”. It is emphasized that “in Brazil, as in other countries around the world, there is no requirement for specific pedagogical training to teach in higher education” (Corrêa *et al.*, 2011, p. 78), that is, specifically pedagogical knowledge is not required.

The instrumental connotation of the regulation in question is highlighted, with the choice of the term preparation instead of training, and it is also considered that the suppression of the *stricto sensu* concept opens gaps so that any *lato sensu* specialization — offered, for the most part, by the private network — belongs to the scope of postgraduate studies and is legitimized as training for university teaching. By this logic, it remains in the idea that, “to be a university professor, the important thing is to master the knowledge of their specialty and the academic forms of their production” (Cunha, 2006, p. 22), but does not necessarily require pedagogical training.

In the context of postgraduate studies, future professors expand their theoretical and instrumental knowledge of research activities and consolidate their knowledge related to their scientific field of activity (Almeida; Pimenta, 2014). Therefore, research activities are more valued, to the detriment of pedagogical training. Given the almost non-existent appropriation

of specific knowledge in the field of pedagogy, the devaluation of the teaching dimension in the academic context is assumed.

It is also noted that there are postgraduate programs that do not systematize knowledge for university teaching and, when they do, this initiation is reduced to a discipline on Higher Education Methodology, with an average workload of 60 hours, insufficient for such training, although we emphasize its importance (Anastasiou, 2011, p. 68).

These limitations concerning the incipient, brief and punctual training processes in postgraduate programs need to be taken into consideration because the students of such programs will be the future university professors. In line with Anastasiou (2011), Corrêa *et al.* (2011) emphasize that pedagogical training does not refer solely to the “information process that can be resolved in lectures given in a few hours”.

Almeida and Pimenta (2011, 2014) indicate that the literature on teaching in higher education discusses the characteristic that identifies the professor at this educational stage as someone who has mastered the knowledge of their area or discipline. However, they do not necessarily know how to teach. The authors claim that university professors do not have training focused on teaching and learning processes and that the constituent elements⁹ of teaching are unknown to these professors. This is why they note that it is essential to prioritize pedagogical training in the budgetary and organizational definitions of higher education institutions, so that it becomes a permanent policy for professional professor development.

Zabalza (2007) questions the issue of specific knowledge, the knowledge of a profession, prevailing to the detriment of the teaching profession in higher education. He claims that the identity of university professors is still more centered on their scientific specialties, such as that of researcher, than on their teaching activities. In this way, the place where identity is deposited is in knowledge about the specialty and not in knowledge about the field of teaching.

For the aforementioned author, the absence or insufficiency of didactic-pedagogical training implies the consolidation of professional vices, deficient practices and mistaken approaches on what it means to exercise teaching, not due to individual malice, but due to the lack of opportunity for a correct construction of professionalization added to the fragile policies of valuing teaching, at an institutional level. In this sense, Zabalza (2007) defends the exercise of

⁹ Relationship between the discipline and the course project, planning, class organization, methodologies and teaching strategies, evaluation, peculiarities of teacher-student interaction, understanding the meaning and significance of their specific area in the formation of students as subjects and citizens, issues that determine what is taught, what it is taught for and the ways in which it is taught and that are specific to the educational activity of teaching (Almeida; Pimenta, 2014, p. 12).

teaching as a professional, specialized activity, which requires specific training for its performance in the university environment.

Paro (2018) states that pedagogical blindness, by completely ignoring the specificity of teaching work, succumbs to amateurism and pedagogical ignorance, which threatens the right to education and its social function. Therefore, completing a subject's program is not a guarantee of teaching or learning (Anastasiou; Alves, 2015), that is, teaching is not just about presenting content to students. To be a professor, it is not enough to have a mastery of topics and/or be a recognized researcher in the area (Zabalza, 2007).

One aspect of disqualification of university pedagogy is when teaching is reduced to technical instrumentalism (Pacheco, 2009), understood as a set of norms and prescriptions; or its training understood as unnecessary and superfluous. This would limit the area of knowledge to teaching methodologies, which comprise it, but are not confined to these elements. "Teaching does not only involve a technical dimension, but also a pedagogical and political dimension, that is, mastery of knowledge in these fields can act as a driving force for the development of social commitment by the professor" (Corrêa *et al.*, 2011).

We agree with Cunha, when discussing the complexity of the pedagogical act:

When we assume that the teaching perspective is structured on specific knowledge, intrinsic to its nature and objectives, we recognize a professional condition for the professor's activity. (...) [*knowledge*] *linked to the pedagogical dimension* is fundamental for the professional structuring of the professor, and should constitute the construct of their initial and/or continuing education (Cunha, 2010, p. 20, emphasis added).

Understanding pedagogical concepts for university teaching as an element for constructing human knowledge and action is to value university pedagogy, a specific scientific field of knowledge that presupposes intentionality in the professor's professional performance. Therefore, it is not enough to know how to do it, it is necessary to understand theoretically why it is done and the consequences of these actions as professors (Cunha, 2018). The author also notes:

What is important, however, is to recognize the existence of a specific scientific field of knowledge that needs to be mobilized so that higher education reaches its political, social and cognitive dimension, which constitutes university pedagogy (Cunha, 2019, p. 128).

There is currently a consensus that teaching requires a repertoire of knowledge and skills that encourage pedagogical strategies and techniques to deal with the complexity of the profession. It is a praxis, a theoretically based activity, because the theory is taken, recreated, and the practice is invented as subjects (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

Saviani, at the end of the 20th century, already mentioned that, to be an educator, it is necessary to know how to educate, and therefore have pedagogical training (Saviani, 1996). Teaching involves challenges and decision-making. From this perspective, in the complexity of everyday university life, teaching planning, based on pedagogical references, also becomes a political pedagogical act in which there is a “commitment to the formation of citizens and to the definition of educational actions necessary for institutions to fulfill their duties and intentions” (Levinski; Correa; Mattos, 2015, p. 213). In line with this, Paro (2018) also considers the pedagogical process as an essentially political act, that is, in teaching work there is a political component inherent to technical/professional performance.

Pedagogical training, from a critical perspective, promotes awareness and makes university professors more prepared to consider the historical, social, cultural and organizational contexts in which they work, as well as questioning the regulatory processes that intensify productivism and the instructional and functional perspective of higher education.

Professor professional development strategies have the potential to provide pedagogical training. In this sense, the role of the pedagogue as a specialist in professor training is highlighted (Anastasiou, 2011), and can be part of pedagogical advisory groups. Cunha suggests that the pedagogue, in these training spaces, is not a supporting actor to legitimize knowledge from other areas, nor are they intended to assume the “function of giving discursive form to what is decided in corporations, so that documents (curricular plans, pedagogical projects, evaluation processes, etc.) are passed on to official bodies” (Cunha, 2006, p. 20), but must invest themselves in the function of mediating and collectively building this (trans)formation and a new academic culture.

(...) it is necessary to create a new academic culture in undergraduate courses: one that considers the student's right to develop an attitude towards knowledge that goes beyond narrow specialization; one that problematizes information and guarantees their training as citizens and professional scientists committed to applying knowledge to improve the quality of life of society as a whole; one that enables the development of autonomous thinking, replacing the simple transmission of knowledge with the engagement of students in a process that allows them to question the knowledge developed, to think and to think critically; one that encourages problem-solving, stimulates discussion, and develops methodologies for searching for and constructing knowledge (teaching with research); one that confronts the knowledge developed and research with reality; one that mobilizes inter and transdisciplinary views on phenomena; one that points out solutions to social problems (teaching with extension); and one that creates a new academic culture that values the work of undergraduate professors (*Ibid.*, p. 9).

Therefore, the university's commitment to teacher training actions in which professors are valued is essential, as is the work of pedagogical support – as discussed by Almeida and

Pimenta (2014) and Corrêa *et al.* (2011) regarding the discussion of the Pedagogical Support Group (GAP, for its acronym in Portuguese). Anastasiou works with the proposal of pedagogical support centers:

These groups will have greater strength and increasing activity if they are constituted in an institutional program that is part of the Institutional Political Project, or linked to teaching professionalization programs with the Pro-Rector of Undergraduate Studies and, we believe, they should be institutionalized, so as to last beyond a specific management proposal (Anastasiou, 2011, p. 69).

This support from the centers, as well as adequate pedagogical support, can strengthen the university's collective spaces, so that they function as open environments that stimulate reflection. Hence the importance of overcoming management policies and becoming institutionalized. The manager/coordinator of courses or other university departments has a fundamental role in defining these policies to enhance teaching and learning. However, what we want to highlight here is that management policy is insufficient to establish university pedagogy in the academic environment.

Adequate pedagogical support from the centers can strengthen the university's collective spaces, so that they function as open, democratic environments that stimulate reflection. Hence the importance of overcoming management policies that create temporary training spaces and becoming institutionalized territories (Cunha, 2008).

BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS

As stated in the introduction to this text, recognition of the need for pedagogical training for higher education professors is today a social and professional imperative. In fact, it is accepted that the teaching profession in higher education requires “specialized training that supports teaching practice, contradicting the traditional empiricism devoid of theory that characterizes teaching practice” (Almeida, 2020, p.18).

Aware that this reflection goes, on occasions, against the current trend of the university, as it is constituent and constituted by society, by preparing individuals for the job market, incurring the risk of disarticulating the profession from a human, critical, social formation capable of acting on reality – which affects the university's three pillars of teaching, research and extension –, we agree with Santos (2005) in defending that the university is a privileged public space for the circulation of ideas, and for open and critical discussion.

It is not because the context is unfavorable that the debate should be abandoned. We advocate a logic of teaching practice in the academic environment that is equipped with counter-hegemonic alternatives. It is urgent to legitimize and invest, financially and institutionally, in university pedagogy. One challenge that Almeida and Pimenta (2014)

consider, among others, is to involve in the training process those professors who do not feel the need to improve professionally in the act of teaching in their teaching practice or to improve their pedagogical relationship with students, colleagues, the institution and themselves. Professional development materializes “in what to teach, in how to organize classes, in valuing students’ attitudes, in evaluating learning” (Cunha, 2019, p. 129).

Alternative and differentiated actions by university professors are ways of resisting and questioning the values present in policies and in the way of organizing work at the university in the national context and situation. In this sense, there is an urgent need for proactive policies that value pedagogical knowledge and actions that deepen reflections and knowledge specific to the teaching profession, which can overcome the idea that those who know how to do know how to teach, since:

Teaching is a very complex action, which requires a deep understanding of the specific area to be taught and its social significance; the organization of the curriculum as a formative path; the broader planning in which a discipline is inserted, as well as its own planning; the method of investigation of an area that supports the method of its teaching, the pedagogical actions; the appropriate resources to achieve the objectives; the ways of relating to the students and of the students with knowledge; the evaluation, among many others (Almeida; Pimenta, 2011, p. 8).

Therefore, teaching activities require specific knowledge and constant updating, in other words, a permanent construction of the teaching identity – pedagogical training of the university professor. Cunha (2010) uses the idea of a profession in action when stating that it is a process, a movement, which is never static and permanent.

Zabalza (2007) proposes axes of renewed professionalism in university teaching: reflection on one's own practice, the adjustment processes; teamwork and cooperation; orientation towards the job market, integration between the exercise of the profession and teaching; teaching planned based on learning and didactics, link between teaching and learning; recovery of the ethical dimension of the profession.

There is no formula for acquiring this professional teaching knowledge, but some elements can be considered regarding the pedagogical training of these university professor, such as those addressed in this text. Policies to enhance university teaching; institutionalization and investment — organizational and financial — in professional development of professors; pedagogical support centers for higher education professors; qualification of teaching work through didactic-pedagogical training; action research – these are actions that indicate a fruitful path for the legitimization of this field of knowledge.

Recognizing the existence of a scientific field of knowledge in university pedagogy that needs to be mobilized and adapted for higher education means thinking responsibly about the

current training of postgraduate students, future university professors. In this sense, it is essential to overcome pedagogical deformations.

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Yuna Lélis Beleza Lopes

PhD student in Education at the *Universidade de São Paulo*. Member of the *Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Formação de Professores e Currículo* (GEPEFOR-FFCLRP-USP). Current study topic: distance teacher training. She works as a teacher in basic education.

yuna.lopes@usp.br

Márcia Mendes Ruiz Cantano

PhD student in Education at the *Universidade de São Paulo*. Member of the *Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Formação de Professores e Currículo* (GEPEFOR-FFCLRP-USP). She works as an Educator at the *Faculdade de Ciências Farmacêuticas* of the *Universidade de São Paulo - FCFRP- USP*, in the following areas: teaching in higher education, university student, pedagogical training for higher education, pedagogical support and PAE-USP program.

marcia.cantano@usp.br

Noeli Prestes Padilha Rivas

Associate Professor at the *Universidade de São Paulo (Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto/Departamento de Educação, Informação e Comunicação)*. Leader of the *Grupo de Estudos e Pesquisas em Formação de Professores e Currículo* (GEPEFOR-FFCLRP-USP). She works in Undergraduate Teaching (Specific Degree Courses and Pedagogy) and in the Postgraduate Program in Education of the FFCLRP/USP (teaching and supervision). She has experience in the area of Education, with an emphasis on Higher Education, Degree Courses and Teacher Training, working in the following areas: higher education, teacher training, curriculum, university pedagogy and pedagogical management.

noerivas@ffclrp.usp.br

How to cite this document – ABNT

LOPES, Yuna Lélis Beleza; CANTANO, Márcia Mendes Ruiz; RIVAS, Noeli Prestes Padilha. Training of graduate students for teaching in higher education: a specific scientific field of knowledge. *Revista Docência do Ensino Superior*, Belo Horizonte, v. 14, e046537, p. 1-16, 2024. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35699/2237-5864.2024.46537>.