



<sup>1</sup> Federal University of the Semi-Arid Region (UFERSA), Caraúbas - RN - Brazil. Graduated in Pedagogy from UERN. Master's student in the Postgraduate Program in Teaching - PosEnsino (UFERSA/UERN/IFRN).

<sup>2</sup> Federal University of the Semi-Arid Region (UFERSA), Mossoró - RN - Brazil. Doctoral degree in Education. Adjunct Professor at the Department of Human Sciences (DCH/UFERSA).

## (AUTO)BIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVE OF A MIDDLE-AGED TEACHER: BETWEEN TRAINING IN THE FIELD AND TEACHING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NARRATIVA (AUTO)BIOGRÁFICA DE UMA PROFESSORA NA MEIA-IDADE: ENTRE A FORMAÇÃO NO CAMPO E O ENSINO NA ESCOLA PÚBLICA

NARRATIVA (AUTO)BIOGRÁFICA DE UNA DOCENTE DE MEDIA EDAD: ENTRE LA FORMACIÓN EN EL CAMPO Y LA DOCENCIA EN LA ESCUELA PÚBLICA

Francisca Neta SALES <sup>1</sup>  
augusta\_sales@hotmail.com  
Emerson Augusto de MEDEIROS <sup>2</sup>  
emerson.medeiros@ufersa.edu.br



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**ABSTRACT:** In this (auto)biographical text, I reflect on the defining moments of my life and teaching training, with an emphasis on the influence of the countryside on the construction of my personal and professional identity. I explore how my peasant origins shaped components of my teaching practice. I base this writing on authors such as Almeida (1998), Freire (2003), and Passeggi (2011), among others. I adopt the (auto)biographical narrative as a qualitative research method, which values memories and life stories. In a non-linear way, I explore fragments that punctuate my life trajectory from childhood in the countryside through my initial training in a Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy, teaching in public schools, and my postgraduate career. With this study, I aim to contribute to the debate about middle-aged women who see teaching and teacher training as a path to emancipation.

**KEYWORDS:** (Auto)biographical narrative. Teacher training. Middle-aged women.

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**RESUMO:** Neste texto, de cunho (auto)biográfico, reflito sobre os momentos marcantes da minha vida e formação docente, com ênfase na influência do campo sobre a construção de minha identidade pessoal e profissional. Exploro como minha origem camponesa desenhou componentes de meu fazer docente. Fundamento este escrito em autores como Almeida (1998), Freire (2003), Passeggi (2011), entre outros. Adoto a narrativa (auto)biográfica como método de pesquisa qualitativa, o qual valoriza as memórias e a história de vida. De forma não linear, exploro fragmentos que pontuam minha trajetória de vida na infância no campo, passando pela formação inicial na Licenciatura em Pedagogia, o ensino na escola pública até meu percurso na pós-graduação. Com este estudo, vislumbro contribuir com o debate acerca das mulheres de meia-idade que veem no ensino e na formação docente um caminho para emancipação.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Narrativa (auto)biográfica. Formação docente. Mulheres de meia-idade.

**RESUMEN:** En este texto, de carácter (auto)biográfico, reflexiono sobre los momentos decisivos de mi vida y formación docente, con énfasis en la influencia del campo en la construcción de mi identidad personal y profesional. Exploro cómo mi origen campesino dio forma a los componentes de mi enseñanza. Este escrito se basa en autores como Almeida (1998), Freire (2003), Passeggi (2011), entre otros. Adopto la narrativa (auto)biográfica como método de investigación cualitativa, que valora los recuerdos y la historia de vida. De manera no lineal, exploro fragmentos que marcan mi trayectoria de vida desde mi infancia en el campo, pasando por la formación inicial en la Licenciatura en Pedagogía, la docencia en la escuela pública hasta mi recorrido de posgrado. Con este estudio espero contribuir al debate sobre las mujeres de mediana edad que ven la docencia y la formación docente como un camino hacia la emancipación.

**KEYWORDS:** Narrativa (auto)biográfica. Formación docente. Mujeres de mediana edad.

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## INTRODUCTION

This work presents an (auto)biographical narrative of a middle-aged teacher and woman who moves between her roots in the countryside and her work in public school teaching, revealing a trajectory marked by challenges, resistance, and overcoming. The (auto)biographical narrative deals with the social and professional formation of the educator and author of this text, whose identity was forged by her experiences in a rural environment, while at the same time building her identity throughout her social and professional practice.

In this context, I would like to highlight the crucial role of education which, even though it was experienced late in life, was fundamental in shaping my life trajectory. According to Freire (2003), education is understood as “a fundamental factor in the reinvention of the world” (p. 10, our translation) suggesting that the educational process has the power to modify social structures, allowing people to become aware of their reality, to act to transform their living conditions.

I understand that it was during my educational career that my life path was shaped. Between childhood memories in the countryside, teacher training, the demands of the classroom, and the arrival at the Master's in Education, a narrative emerges that reflects not only personal transformations but also the tensions and learning that resulted from the transition between different spaces and contexts. From this perspective, this reflection seeks to understand how the marks of a peasant background influence the practice of teaching and the construction of a teacher's identity in a society that is constantly changing.

With this in mind, when I set out to narrate my (auto)biography, it is as if I were telling a story, in which I embark on a deep and reflective journey. I awaken memories long dormant, some almost forgotten, while others remain alive in my mind. Reopening the pages of this internal book made me relive moments that bring back good, bad, happy, and sad memories. According to Lima (2005), every time a story is told, both in the universe of the narrator and that of the listener/reader, it is recreated. But what would we be without our memories? If we didn't recreate our moments, we would stop writing in the book of our lives.

It is in this universe of recreation that my (auto)biographical narrative unfolds. As stated by Passeggi (2011), autobiography “consists of the action of writing the narrative of one's own life” (p. 15, our translation). Although my story seems commonplace, similar to so many others, it carries an unusual singularity, because it brings the unique perspective of those who lived it. Each line written has been constructed along the journey of my being, interweaving experiences, learning, and reflections that, together, have formed the essence of who I am today.

<sup>3</sup> The construction of this text was guided by Prof. Dr. Emerson Augusto de Medeiros, whom I thank for his dedication, pertinent signals, and care in reviewing the article. The text is written in the first person singular because it presents an (auto)biographical narrative of its central author.

In these pages, I share memories that, at first, may seem insignificant, but which, for me, were essential in the construction of my personal and professional identity, going beyond a simple chronological account of the moments I lived through. This is a rescue in which I try to understand and make sense of the journey that has brought me to the present historical moment. Through these pages, I revisit and explore what influenced me, what discouraged me, every challenge I faced, and every achievement that made me stronger. Every moment I have experienced, no matter how simple, has contributed to weaving the complex fabric that makes up my life story.

In addition to this introduction, the text is organized into three more sections, as well as the final considerations. The first briefly discusses some theoretical reflections on the history of women in Brazilian society. The second section deals with the study's methodological assumptions, stating this text from the perspective of (auto)biographical narrative, based on qualitative research. The third section is made up of fragments of my life story, in which each trace has been marked by the uniqueness that makes up my personal construction and teaching identity. In the final considerations, I present a summary of the reflections made throughout this text.

### ***Women in Brazilian society: a brief historical approach***

Throughout history, women have faced continuous challenges, reflecting a gradual process of subordination and resistance. Since the colonization of Brazil, “human development” in the country has been predominantly defined from a male perspective, in which “[...] women’s development was determined by the men in their lives” (Carter et al., 2001, p. 30, our translation). In this patriarchal context, women were relegated to the margins of society, with social roles limited to domestic duties and looking after the home.

Formal education and opportunities for personal and professional development were almost exclusively reserved for men, education was seen as “contrary to both the role of women and their nature: femininity and knowledge are excluded, because an educated woman is not a woman” (Perrot, 2015, p. 93, our translation), thus perpetuating gender inequality. This social structure not only restricted female autonomy, but also reinforced the view that women should limit themselves to the domestic sphere, as wives and mothers.

According to Vieira et al. (2022), studying has always been a challenge for women, even those from wealthy families were completely excluded from the right to formal education. The struggle to break down these barriers was, and still is, arduous, driven by social movements that challenged these norms and demanded the right to education and equal participation in all social spheres. This process of transformation has been essential for building a more inclusive and equitable society, allowing women to achieve greater autonomy and visibility in various sectors of public life in Brazil.

In her studies, Louro (1997) emphasizes that “the social and political segregation to which women have historically been led has resulted in their widespread invisibility as subjects” (p. 17, our translation). This systematic exclusion relegated women to the margins of historical records and knowledge production, limiting their voices and contributing to the perpetuation of power structures that naturalized gender inequality. It was in a slow process that women began to gain visibility and began to occupy a role in society, being able to act in the public sphere. Their role in schools and teaching was validated on the basis of the duties traditionally attributed to them, such as looking after the home, the husband, and the children, and educating the new generations (Louro, 1997).

Over time, this reality has begun to change, driven by social and political movements that defend gender equality and the right to education for all. As women began to enter the Brazilian education system, they not only gained access to knowledge but also began to occupy leadership positions as educators, pedagogues, and school administrators (Vieira et al., 2022). This presence has brought new perspectives, contributing to a more diverse and inclusive educational environment and, consequently, to the reduction of social inequalities.

It is in this diverse and inclusive environment that the middle-aged peasant woman has been conquering her space, starting her academic training at a stage of life considered by many to be late, challenging pre-established notions about time and learning potential. Their journey in university spaces goes beyond the search for qualifications, it also represents an affirmation of their dignity and ability to contribute to society. During this period of maturation, she faces and overcomes various adversities, balancing family and professional responsibilities with her studies, which shows her resilience and potential to achieve significant results both personally and professionally.

According to Margis and Cordioli (2001), it is during this period that the person makes a self-assessment of themselves, their life, and their projects, reviews their choices and attitudes, and questions the whole journey they have already been on. It’s normal at this stage of life for women to review their priorities and try to make their dreams come true. From this perspective, Leonel (2016) explains that the “project and the dream seem to give each woman a meaning to her life, a desire to live to achieve it” (p. 12, our translation), strengthening herself to achieve her life project and thus increasing her self-confidence and self-esteem.

### *Research with (auto)biographical narratives in teacher training*

After the 1980s, the (auto)biographical method gained prominence on the educational scene by valuing the subjective and intersubjective elements of subjects in educational research. This approach has brought teachers’ pedagogical practice to the fore, removing them from

<sup>4</sup> The middle-aged woman is understood in this text as someone who exercises her social practice beyond the age of 40. She entered higher education or even public school teaching at an age that differs from what most women enter.

passivity and placing them as the protagonists of the actions developed in schools (Nóvoa & Finger, 2010). According to Nóvoa and Finger (2010, p. 26, our translation), “this practice makes it easier to define the knowledge and training that is most necessary to carry out the role of trainer.”

By adopting the (auto)biographical narrative method of investigation, it is possible to experience the subject’s individual experience in greater depth, which enriches qualitative research, since one of its roles in qualitative research is related to the construction of meanings from simple, everyday things (Turato, 2005; Villegas & González, 2011). In this sense, reflection on teaching practice contributes significantly to the construction of professional identity.

Complementing this view, Minayo (2004) points out that qualitative research is dedicated to answering particular questions, which allows for a detailed analysis of the reality of events and social interactions. This approach results in a thorough understanding of the issues associated with the subject under study, offering a more comprehensive and in-depth view of the actions involved, which is fundamental for building contextualized knowledge.

In this way, working with “narratives enables a singular and universal understanding to take place, since the narration of facts present in the history of one subject can also be part of the life history of other subjects” (Santos & Rios, 2023, p. 4, our translation). By sharing personal facts and feelings, the narrative, as well as reflecting individual experience, also connects to the stories of similar lives, revealing something unique about the individual and, at the same time, resonating with the experience of others, creating an interconnection between the specific and the general.

This interconnection is particularly evident when we consider the narrative of a middle-aged peasant woman who expresses and highlights her practice through her personal and professional trajectory. As noted by Villegas and González (2011), “the context in which we carry out our daily lives is full of transcendent particularities and subjectivities, although at first glance it doesn’t seem so” (p. 41, our translation), so we can’t minimize research with (auto)biographical narratives; on the contrary, the apparently obvious context has a lot to tell us and deserves to be explored in depth.

### ***The (auto)biographical narrative: four memorial fragments of a middle-aged woman teacher***

The textual organization I have chosen to weave my (auto)biographical narrative, made up of fragments that shape the story of my life, does not follow a linear path through the facts, but relives the trajectory that constitutes me as the person I am today. From my memories, I trace an intimate relationship with the motivations that led me to become a teacher after middle age and, currently, to embark on the path of training as a researcher in the Master’s



program. Bringing up fragments of my past is not just about reporting what happened to me, but exploring “which fragment of autobiography is highlighted at a certain crossroads in life” (Harré, 1998, p. 146, our translation). In this interweaving of memories and reflections, I reveal the crucial moments, the crossroads that, when revisited, shed light on the choices and challenges that have led me here, highlighting the complex web of influences and decisions that, over time, have forged my personal and professional identity.

In this narrative, I try to relive, through four fragments of memory, the records that hold the insights of my construction as a person, woman, mother, wife, teacher, and researcher. In the first fragment, I explore my origins in the countryside, the context in which I began to be formed as a subject.

I recognize that it was during my educational career that this identity was consolidated. Between childhood memories in the countryside, teacher training, classroom experiences, and the arrival at the Master’s in Education, a narrative emerges that reflects not only personal transformations but also the constant evolution of my professional practice.

### *1st Fragment: childhood memories in the countryside*

I was born and raised in the rural area of the municipality of Caraúbas, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil. I’m the seventh child of nine siblings, the daughter of farming parents who fought tirelessly to feed and educate our large family. I have many memories of my childhood, marked by simplicity and challenges, but also by happy moments. Our diet was based on what my father produced through farming, a daily effort that guaranteed our survival and taught us to value what the land offered us.

As we got older, we started helping with the work. The boys had the task of accompanying our father in the field; the girls had to do the housework, such as learning to cook, wash, iron, and look after the children. From an early age, we were taught to be “ladies” of the house, just like my mother.

We had a strict upbringing, especially on the part of our father. He was one of those guys who could tell you what he wanted just by looking at you. However, he was a caring and very loving father to all of us. I loved it when evening came, and we all sat in a circle in the yard of the house we lived in to listen to our father recite poetry, tell stories, or recite the *cordéis* he had memorized. How good it is to relive those moments. I loved the *cordéis* he recited so much that I learned to read through them.

The street market in the neighboring town was on Saturdays. We waited for our father to arrive in the evening. For each child, he brought a treat, for the girls, “a sweet in the shape of a sugar doll.” We were delighted, but first, we played around a bit; after all, although she was sweet, she was also a doll. In our reality, our parents couldn’t afford to buy toys.

However, life isn't a fairy tale, and the generation I'm part of had a rigid upbringing. "From childhood, we are brought up to be subservient to male figures, from our parents to our partners" (Santos & Rios, 2023, p. 10, our translation). We learned to obey, to remain silent in the face of impositions, and to fulfill the roles assigned to us without question. For girls, this meant working in the domestic sphere (Almeida, 1998). To learn the trade of housewife, to prepare to be a good housewife and, after marriage, to be a good wife and mother. However, I didn't want just that.

It's worth saying that this subservient upbringing wasn't just limited to preparing for the roles of good wife and mother. The cultural traits of not valuing children's voices were very present. When the adults talked, the children were not allowed to have their say or be present in the conversation. I've never been able to talk about my feelings, desires, or doubts. We grew up in an environment where we couldn't express ourselves to adults, we just answered what they asked us and did as we were told. I grew up a shy girl with little to say and full of dreams that were kept in the closed box of my memory.

The school in the community where I lived was right next to my parents' house. From there, I could vividly hear the voice of the teacher, who spoke very loudly, conducting the lessons. I remember how literacy was based on spelling out the syllables of words and the students repeating them in chorus. From an early age, I had a strong desire to go to school, but for reasons I can't explain, I wasn't able to start until I was eight years old. It was then that I had my first contact with formal education.

Even though I started literacy late, I soon began to read my first words. I learned the "multiplication table" part from my mother because even though she had very little schooling, she was very good with numbers. She fought hard for our education, she really wanted her children to study so that they wouldn't have the hard life that she and my father had, due to the lack of opportunities. He swore that he would never teach his daughters to be seamstresses, because he didn't want us to do it, he wanted us to study so that we could have better opportunities, at least until we got married.

So, four years passed, and I finished my first cycle of schooling, fourth grade. If I wanted to continue my studies, I would have to move to the urban perimeter. In 1986, my parents enrolled me in the Sebastião Gurgel State School in the city of Caraúbas (RN). I already had two brothers who were studying in the city, and I was the third of the offspring to want to continue studying, some older than me didn't want to and continued to help my father so that those who wanted to could continue. Of those who were already studying, my eldest sister came to work as a nanny, studying and working to help with the household expenses.

Every day, my brother and I would cycle 18 kilometers from the countryside to the city, studying in the middle hours, from 11 am to 2:30 pm. That way, we could make the journey without too many difficulties. It was only bad during the rainy season, as the rivers would overflow,



making it very difficult for us to cross, as we had to swim and carry our bikes. After almost two years of making this journey every day, our father managed to build a small house in the suburb of Caraúbas (RN) for us to spend the week, going to the countryside on holidays and weekends.

I found it very difficult to adapt to studying in the city; there were so many subjects, each subject had its teacher, there was a lot of “stuff” to study, and school content I had never heard of. I felt a whirlwind of sensations: fear, anxiety, and anguish. Many times I cried, wanting to give up and go back to the warmth of my home, to my mother. But I soon realized that if I dropped out, my future would be spent working in the fields or washing clothes, earning little financially, just like many rural girls who didn’t want to or didn’t have the opportunity to study.

I went through a lot of trials and almost failed the fifth grade, but in the end, I passed. The following years went more smoothly, and I had already adapted to the routine and the new life. When it was time for me to go to 8th grade, my brother was attending high school in the evening. So that we could go to school together, I also decided to study at night.

I lived in the countryside until I was a teenager, between trips to the city. The house where I was born and raised is still there. From time to time, when I feel homesick, I go back to get a taste of my parents’ home, which never ceases to be ours. Today, they are no longer physically present, but I believe they will be forever between those walls, because their memories will never be forgotten, they live on as memories. In the next fragment, I’ll tell you about my adolescence, the stage of my marriage, and the hibernation of my studies.

## *2nd Fragment: marriage in adolescence*

I got married very young, when I was only fifteen. If I believed that my father was macho and authoritarian, it was no different with my husband. I went from living with one patriarch to another: my husband, eighteen years older than me, a man from the countryside, deeply marked by the values of the patriarchal system. For him, after marriage, women shouldn’t study, let alone work outside the home. All I had to do was obey because, according to the precepts I was brought up with, “a married woman had to submit to her husband’s authority” (Hahner, 2003, p. 44–45, our translation).

I went through many difficult times in my marriage, the cruelest being my parents’ lack of acceptance. They wouldn’t allow me to marry, saying that the step I had taken wasn’t right and that it would bring me a lot of suffering, as my husband had a “reputation as a womanizer.” As punishment for my stubbornness, they turned away from me, forbidding me even to walk in their house or ask for their blessing. I suffered a lot from this rejection, because I’ve always been very attached to my family. However, completely in love, I moved on alone, without family support, relying only on the company of my husband.

I never thought that, because I was married, I would abandon my studies because I always dreamed of having a degree, a profession, and a more stable life. However, the year after I got married, I didn't go back to school. My husband didn't agree with me continuing to study, as he believed that my only duty was to look after the house and him.

This made me feel deeply oppressed. Would my destiny always be to obey, without ever gaining autonomy? Little by little, I ended up settling down, feeling that I had no alternatives. What else could I do? As Freire (1987) observes, "the oppressed, however, accommodated and adapted, 'immersed' in the very machinery of the dominating structure, fear freedom, while they do not feel capable of taking the risk of assuming it" (p. 23, our translation). Without the support of my family, I was forced to follow the rules imposed by my oppressor, my husband.

It was just like that: I was afraid to fight for my freedom, "also to the extent that fighting for it meant a threat" (Freire, 1987, p. 23, our translation). I was afraid of leaving my comfort zone and losing my home and my husband because a separated woman was frowned upon by society. What would become of me without a husband and family? So life went on. Over time, our first child was born, and I went through difficult situations, alone with a child, with no one to turn to in times of need.

My parents' "predictions" came true, and I suffered many marital betrayals. My husband spent weeks away on business, and on the weekends, when he was at home, he dedicated himself to parties. I, always at home, found solace only in my son, to whom I devoted all my love, coming to terms with the situation.

Over the years, I became more and more resigned to my reality, to the life I hadn't planned but which was now mine. As Freire (1987) states, "As long as they are touched by the fear of freedom, they refuse to appeal to others and to listen to the appeal that is made to them or that they have made to themselves, preferring gregariousness to authentic coexistence" (p. 23, our translation). The days became monotonous and repetitive, filled only with household chores and looking after my son. The hope of resuming my studies or building a career slowly faded, like a flame that loses strength over time.

Ten years passed, and I finally got my parents' forgiveness and was able to go back to their house. The happiness I felt was immense, this reconciliation lit a flame of hope inside me. I realized that we don't have to live under anyone's oppression all our lives. Life, with its unpredictable twists and turns, began to show me new paths, and hope began to spring up inside me. Small signs of change appeared, as if fate was offering me another chance.

Some conversations with friends and stories of other women who, like me, had faced difficult situations and managed to get back on their feet, were fundamental to my recovery. Their overcoming stories showed me that it was possible to turn delicate situations into learning. I realized I wasn't alone. Perhaps there was still time to take up the dreams I had once left behind and rebuild my life according to my desires and values.

It was then that I decided to go back to the first year of high school. As my eldest son grew up, I realized that I could finally think about returning to my studies. Returning to school wasn't easy. I faced many challenges, especially the resistance of my husband, who was still opposed to my education. But this time I didn't falter.

So, I managed to graduate from high school, but I knew that this achievement was only the beginning. I didn't intend to stop there. My goal was to get a degree, have a profession and finally realize the dream that once seemed impossible. In the next fragment, I'll tell you about this new step in my life: studying for a degree in Pedagogy and becoming a teacher in middle age.

### *3rd Fragment: how did I become a teacher in middle age?*

I finished high school, but once again, I was faced with the imperative of not disobeying my husband and "the patriarchal family pattern, which directly influences women's intention to enter higher education, since their priorities must be their children, their husband, and their home" (Vieira et al., 2022, p. 12, our translation). In order to attend university, I would have to move to another city, because there was no higher education on offer in Caraúbas (RN), which would take me away from my domestic obligations.

However, I was delighted to see the possibility of the creation of the Advanced Nucleus of the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN) for Caraúbas (RN), a step by the public university towards the internalization of higher education. In 2005, I passed the Vocational Selection Process to study for a degree in Pedagogy. I was ecstatic, I had finally achieved my dream of a degree, even if it wasn't the one I wanted. It was a big deal for me to become a teacher after so many years, to go to university.

The big day has arrived: the start of university classes. I felt strange, because I wasn't so young anymore. But that didn't matter, the important thing was that I managed to get a university education. To continue my dream of studying, graduating, and "having a degree." However, I feared that I wouldn't understand the curriculum content or be able to do all the reading and activities. After all, my time wasn't exclusively for my studies.

My first teaching experience came during my supervised internship, a compulsory subject in my Pedagogy course. According to Pimenta (2012), the supervised internship is the moment when students develop the essential actions for their teaching career, consolidating both their human and professional training. When I entered the classroom for my first lesson, I was terrified. It was a second-grade class made up of thirty-two students. The children were noisy, they didn't listen to what I was saying. At that moment, I thought to myself: "I don't want this for myself; being a teacher isn't what I want for my life." I ended the first day of school with frustration.

For the next day's lesson, I planned the activities in a dynamic way, including literacy games and group dynamics. According to Freire (2005), I tried to build teaching that was contextualized with the children's reality. My aim was to keep them excited by encouraging par-

ticipation and involvement in the activities. It worked! From that day on, every day, I brought something new, always focused on arousing interest in the class.

The internship came to an end, but I enjoyed being a teacher so much that I made myself available whenever the head teacher needed help. She, in turn, didn't hesitate to ask for support, and I ended up practically taking over the class afterward. Every week, she asked me to replace her. I'm very grateful to the teacher and the school for this opportunity, which has really strengthened my teaching skills.

When I finished my degree in Pedagogy in 2009, I was hired by the municipality to teach in rural areas. I was happy because I would have the opportunity to return as a teacher to the school where I had once been a pupil. In addition, the fact that I could contribute to the education of children from the same community where I grew up filled me with pride and responsibility. I knew that by teaching, I was also giving back to that school a little of what I had received as a student.

Now that I had achieved my autonomy by overcoming the barriers that made it impossible for me to study, I didn't want to stop, and also because I believe that the "re-evaluation of learning processes, familiarization with the media ..., the ability to think and act with broader horizons" (Libâneo, 2001, p. 5, our translation), is fundamental for the continuous training of teachers. Every day, with each course, we build more learning, so I did three specializations, and in 2019, I returned to the Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA), studying for a degree in Letters – Portuguese. In 2021, I was successful in the selection process for the state of Rio Grande do Norte, and returned to teaching elementary school in a state school in the city of Caraúbas (RN).

When I returned as an undergraduate, as a middle-aged woman in the midst of so many young people, it seemed strange. I noticed looks on my face, but not with exclusion, perhaps questioning why I was only now seeking training. I find it difficult to get along, I feel awkward in the environment, but my desire to produce knowledge is greater. I'm not communicative; ever since I was a child, I've had limitations when it comes to speaking in public and building friendships. I'm always quiet, but I'm not excluded. Young people even approach me, even though I'm shy.

Similarly, when I arrived at the school, I noticed that there were few middle-aged women on the teaching staff. These few, however, represent many others who didn't have the courage or the opportunities to seek knowledge and training. It is in this context, returning as a student with a degree in Letters - Portuguese and as a public school teacher, that my concerns emerged, leading me to problematize and want to research the processes of education and immersion in teaching middle-aged peasant women. This includes the late entry of these women into higher education in degree courses and their subsequent immersion in teaching in public schools after completing the course.

These questions will be addressed in the next fragment, in which I'll tell you about my entry into postgraduate studies *stricto-sensu*.

#### 4th Fragment: an achievement - entering the Master's in Education course

Postgraduate studies seemed unattainable to me, I never imagined that I would be able to study for a master's degree. I kept imagining myself in front of professors with PhDs, all extremely intelligent and, in my perception, far superior to me. However, in 2021, I saw the opportunity to try. A young graduate of the Postgraduate Program in Teaching (PosEnsino), a broad association between the State University of Rio Grande do Norte, the Federal Rural University of the Semi-Arid (UFERSA), and the Federal Institute of Education, Science, and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN), has opened a class for people interested in learning how to prepare a research project at master's level. As soon as I heard about it, I grabbed the opportunity with all my might. I studied intensely, with sleepless nights and weekends dedicated to reading and writing.

At the end of 2022, I tried to enter as a regular student in the master's selection of the aforementioned program (the PosEnsino); I passed the first stage of the process, and I had my project accepted, but unfortunately, in the third stage, I didn't succeed. However, this didn't put me off, I just saw that it wasn't time to become a researcher. That same year, I enrolled as a special student, and to my delight, I took two courses in the first semester of 2023 and two more in the following semester.

Today, I can see how important this Master's degree experience was for me as a unique student, because the experiences I had with the program opened up a range of knowledge and my maturation as a novice researcher. So, in 2024, I applied again for a master's degree and was successfully selected as a regular student in two programs: one in Education and the other in Teaching. In view of my experience in the Master's in Education as a special student, I opted to take a PosEnsino course.

I can say that I have been extremely blessed along this path. Although I face challenges and have to make sacrifices to meet the demands of this high level of study, every effort has been worthwhile. As stated by Medeiros et al. (2023, p. 04, our translation), "Training is understood as a process of personal development and structuring, influenced by internal maturation and by the learning opportunities and experiences lived." This formative trajectory, with its difficulties and opportunities, has been fundamental to my growth. I am deeply grateful for everything I have achieved during my life.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By questioning how patriarchal values shaped my path in the context of the countryside, I found the strength I needed to become a resilient woman, capable of dealing with the adversities that life imposes. In the midst of so many struggles, I recognize how victorious

I am. To say that my husband no longer appeals against my studies and my work wouldn't be true; he still opposes it. However, I learned to stand up to their intolerance and move forward, firm in my convictions, valuing every achievement throughout this process.

The journey that has permeated my life has left fragments that reflect significant moments which, in a way, have shaped my life trajectory and education. These moments made me realize that the field was, and still is, the first formative space, fundamental to the beginning of my personal and professional construction. According to Vygotsky (1995), culture serves as a means by which human beings internalize knowledge and acquire cognitive skills. I understand that it was through the challenges and lessons learned in everyday rural life that I developed values, skills, and knowledge that directly influenced my identity as a woman, mother, and teacher. The field not only marked the beginning of this trajectory, but continues to be a source of inspiration and reference in my social practice.

Although I know that formative processes do not begin and end at school, it is through formal education that we build the knowledge that drives us toward freedom and self-esteem. It was the knowledge produced throughout my career that allowed me to see myself as a person capable of fighting for my rights, while still fulfilling my duties.

I, therefore, recognize the importance of giving visibility to (auto)biographies, especially those of middle-aged peasant women. As Passeggi (2010) points out, autobiography is a narrative device that encompasses both the training of the adult and that of the trainer. Valuing the experiences of these women is essential, because their experiences bring with them a richness that deserves to be recognized. For them, education represents an opportunity to fulfill dreams, gain a place in society, achieve financial freedom, strengthen self-esteem, and become a path to personal and social emancipation.



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