

LETTER TO TEACHER-TRAINING STUDENTS

*CARTA AOS ESTUDANTES DOS CURSOS DE LICENCIATURA*

*CARTA A LOS ESTUDIANTES DEL CURSO DE LICENCIATURA*



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**ABSTRACT:** This text is an essay letter, whose addressees are our dear undergraduate students. It is an appeal to the humanity in each one of us, as a call to teaching. It emerges from the observation that, increasingly, there is less interest in teaching and more empty benches in teacher training courses. We write to our students three lessons that motivate us to be a teacher: (I) the Sankofa lesson, or the importance of re-signifying the past; (II) the beggar's lesson, dealing with the present time and the greatness of looking at the lived world; and (III), the lesson of hope, which can help build another future for and in the teaching profession. In the end, we subscribe to everything we can learn from these three lessons, hoping for a better world for all forms of planetary life.

**KEYWORDS:** Teaching. Teacher Education. Teacher-training.

**RESUMO:** *Este texto é uma carta-ensaio, cujos destinatários são nossos caros estudantes nas licenciaturas. É um apelo à humanidade em cada um, como um vocativo à docência. Emerge da constatação de que, cada vez mais, há menos interesse no magistério e mais bancos vazios nos cursos de formação docente. Escrevemos aos nossos estudantes três lições que nos motivam a Ser Professor: (I) a lição da Sankofa, ou a importância de ressignificar o passado; (II) a lição do pedinte, tratando do tempo presente e a grandeza de se olhar para o mundo vivido; e (III) a lição da esperança, que pode ajudar a construir outro futuro para e no magistério. Ao final, subscrevemos tudo o que podemos aprender com essas três lições, esperando um mundo melhor para todas as formas de vida planetária.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Docência. Formação de Professores. Licenciaturas.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este texto es una carta ensayo, cuyos destinatarios son nuestros queridos estudiantes de pregrado. Es un llamado a la humanidad que hay en cada uno de nosotros, como un llamado a la enseñanza. Surge de la observación de que, cada vez, hay menos interés por la docencia y más bancas vacías en los cursos de formación docente. Escribimos a nuestros alumnos tres lecciones que nos motivan a Ser Profesores: (I) la lección Sankofa, o la importancia de resignificar el pasado; (II) la lección del mendigo, que trata sobre el presente y la grandeza de mirar el mundo vivido; y (III), la lección de la esperanza, que puede ayudar a construir otro futuro para y en la profesión docente. Al final, nos suscribimos a todo lo que podemos aprender de estas tres lecciones, con la esperanza de un mundo mejor para todas las formas de vida planetaria.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *Enseñanza. Formación de Profesores. Grados.*

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## To all undergraduate students

This is a text aimed at our “dear students”, and can be understood as a letter addressed to all the people we have had, and those we will still have, the privilege of meeting in classrooms, on undergraduate courses<sup>4</sup>. And it was precisely our experience as teachers who train other teachers that inspired us to write this letter.

Over the last few years, we have adopted the essay as a “spokesperson” for the visa and lived it in our experience as teacher trainers. After all, when we write about our own experience, we can express ourselves freely, exploring creativity in writing and making memories of teaching without necessarily transforming everyday life into data that bring “truths”, but rather into examples of what was done /is done, as an expression of what we are and/or believe.

Furthermore, when we rehearse based on what we have experienced, we realize that we have established a continuous way of developing our capacities for imagination and reflection, qualities that are so necessary for the daily exercise of teaching. Furthermore, the essay is a powerful way to ask questions about our own craft. And it is the questions that set us in motion, enabling progressive teaching, of resistance, of transformation, which we have not yet fully achieved, but we continue to consciously seek.

Thus, although geographically located in such different locations, we find ourselves in a common place in our daily lives as teacher educators. This place becomes the impetus for this text, which we can describe as an essay letter: at the same time that we once again exercise the essay as a self-examination of our task, we have recipients to whom we address our concerns and aspirations about teaching. It is about expressing common challenges in our professional activity, the solution of which requires the active participation of our dear students.

Here is the impulse: over the years in teaching, as teachers who train other teachers, we have developed the awareness that degree courses are less and less sought after, leaving empty chairs in the classrooms; In some cases, our students pursue degrees as the last or even only course option (schedule offered, location of the institution, etc.), with the decision to embrace teaching as a profession rarely seen as a great idea. This situation is not recent, nor is it exclusive to our Brazilian reality. Portuguese authors, such as Canário (2008) and Nóvoa (2017), reported a lack of interest in a teaching career in the European Union and in the option of undergraduate courses as the last or only option for students.

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<sup>4</sup> In Brazil and other countries, initial teacher training is a degree course that combines training in a specific area with pedagogical training, with variations in workload and duration.

Of course, it is not always the lack of identification or affinity with the course or with teaching itself that causes low demand and dropout from degree courses and the teaching profession. There is also a lack of identification or affinity with the course or teaching that can cause this scenario. However, dear students, we need to understand that there are other issues that influence this context, perhaps even more complex, and many of you know it well: the lack of a favorable professional perspective, that is, worthy opportunities to practice teaching, a weak or non-existent policy to value training and the teaching profession, among other issues. Therefore, never forget: it is easy to make any individual full of dreams, but without concrete prospects for a promising life, succumb.

In one way or another, the relationships that many of you establish with degree courses and with teaching as a future profession led us to the decision to write this letter, as it moves us, worries us, encourages us to reflect, it asks us questions, invites us to action. This is because, as many of you know, the risk of many students not remaining in these courses and in teaching as a future profession is real. The low demand for undergraduate courses and the lack of vacancies in these courses are increasingly challenging.

We may not yet be able to predict the risks and consequences of the exposed scenario for the future of the profession and society itself. But, in any case, your evasion of undergraduate courses has repercussions on the present and future of the profession and, consequently, on various dimensions of planetary life. Therefore, we believe that all those involved in and with teacher training, in undergraduate courses, cannot fall into an attitude of indifference in the face of this situation. This includes not only us, teacher trainers, but you, dear students, teachers in training (some of whom are already teaching).

Here, we want to tell you that the growing lack of interest of many students in the teaching profession is often evident, as well as teaching as a profession full of challenges. But, dear students, there is often a kind of silence regarding the legitimate interest of many in the profession. From our perspective, it seems to us that you are exposed to a negative charge that has been symbolically built on the teaching profession, to the detriment of the interest and engagement that many other undergraduate students have in teaching. Through such statements, may you always be moved by the esteem for all human beings and for planetary life, because, without such appreciation, teaching does not fulfill its noble purpose: contributing to the dignity of each person, to the common good and a sustainable planetary life.

Allow us, at the beginning of the dialogue, to say that this letter is necessary for several reasons and here we note two: 1) so that the valuable work of training and promotion of

teaching, carried out by so many teacher trainers, is not lost from other teachers; 2) this letter can be an instrument to encourage a common dialogue between you, students, and us, teachers who train other teachers, as well as among you students on undergraduate courses, aiming to build processes of listening, reciprocal support and, who knows, decision-making and the courage to embrace teaching as a profession and as a life option.

Having presented the context, intention and style of this letter-essay, in what follows, we discuss three lessons that motivate us to Become a Teacher, which we chose to share here because they represent the teaching we desire: (I) the Sankofa lesson, or the importance of giving new meaning to the past; (II) the lesson of the beggar, dealing with the present time and the greatness of looking at the lived world; and (III), the lesson of hope, which can help build another future for and in teaching. In the end, we subscribe to everything we can learn from these three lessons, hoping for a better world for all forms of planetary life.

### **Being a Teacher means giving new meaning to the past: the lesson of Sankofa**

See, dear students, our concern with a degree as the only or last option is the fact that it highlights a lack of desire for teaching as a life goal. We know that if our profession of choice becomes a job of chance or lack of choice, we often have teaching that is indifferent to everything and everyone. Everything starts to be disdained, from the classes that are conducted robotically (spilling the curricular contents onto the board and into the winds), to the institution that has no value in society, to the students themselves who, over the years, are seen as people increasingly less interested in learning.

We have all had, at some point in our lives, classes with random teachers, trained (sometimes not) by circumstances and not by the desire of teaching. Our profession, unfortunately, suffers from this possibility of ascending to it without any vocation, preparation or even desire. This is portrayed in the old saying “those who don’t know, teach”.

With this, we come to recognize that the view that many of you have about degree courses and teaching is, at times, a little distorted and tied to negative school experiences from the past, or even the present. This scenario often comes with your rejection of teaching, doubts and difficulties in engaging in these courses. In this case, we believe that the great lesson of Sankofa, the Adinkra symbol of resistance, fits: learning from the lessons of the past, transforming the present time.

According to Rodrigues (2016, p. 39), “Sankofa is an African bird with two heads, one facing the past and the other facing the future, and according to African philosophy it means returning to the past to give new meaning to the present”. This symbolism of looking at the past and the present at the same time is powerful, as it reveals how one learns from lived experiences. Sankofa represents steps backwards, as if seeking momentum to jump further forward.

In fact, according to Nogueira (2019, p. 54), in the dialect of *Twi*, “Sankofa means going back and looking for what was left behind”. In other words, it is a return to the past, to past experiences, with a very clear pedagogical purpose: learning what can be done differently. According to Nogueira (2019, p. 64): “sankofa is the third stage of a process that begins with san-kohwe (return to see) followed by san-kotsei (return to listen, study)”. This is exactly what Motta (2022, p. 13) stated: “Sankofa is related to the principle of return as a search for references to encourage moving forward [...]. It’s not taboo to go back and look for what you forgot.”

Sankofa’s lesson in the context of Being a Teacher, we say to you, dear students, do not let yourselves be overcome by discouragement, on the contrary, dare to follow this path of becoming a Teacher. Because, despite the hints of disenchantment, it is a craft of courage and hope for a better world.

Therefore, we have the honor of telling you that Paulo Freire’s writings constitute the roots of this argument, for the way they have inspired us to become aware of the meanings and meanings of what it means to be a teacher. His lessons, direct or through metaphors, have revealed to us how we can make the exercise of the profession of teachers, trainers of other teachers, a profession of cultivation, in which we sow humanity in the form of dialogue, affection and rigor.

Paulo Freire (1996, p. 145) wrote: “as a strictly human practice I could never understand education as a cold, soulless experience, in which feelings and emotions, desires, dreams must be repressed by a kind of dictatorship reactionalist”. And we say now, to you dear students, as a strictly human practice, we can never understand education without feelings, emotions and the countless virtues, such as hope, kindness, kindness, perseverance, wisdom, serenity, among many others that make us humans.

As you can see, what stands out in this contribution by Freire (1996) is that aspects of the human condition, such as virtues, feelings, emotions, desires and dreams that constitute and often disturb the human heart, for example, they attribute life to education and, consequently, more education to life. And without these aspects, education generates fatigue, hope disappears

and education becomes tasteless; or, in Freire's words, a cold and soulless experience. In this sense, the human condition, understood here, above all, as the incompleteness of every human being, but also in its desire for plenitude, is a training school for teaching. Therefore, we chose to tell you, dear students, that Being a Teacher is an art of immersion in the human condition, which is a living reality and requires deep human relationships of affection and hope.

With Paulo Freire, we continue our reflections with you through this letter and reinforce the idea that Being a Teacher, as already outlined, implies responsibly caring for the humanity of others and planetary life, without ceasing to cultivate one's own humanity. This means that whenever someone takes responsibility for a classroom, in a sense, they take on the responsibility of caring for the humanity of others. But, as noted by Paulo Freire (2005, p. 44), this "[...] action is only human when, more than a pure doing, it is a what-to-do, that is, when it is also not dichotomized from reflection".

That is why it is important that you carry with you the idea that becoming a teacher cannot be the result of chance (if chance even exists), nor just a consequence of the degree as a graduation option, or second option, or only option. Being a Teacher, from our point of view, is a profession of choice in which, consciously, we always look for ways to discover how to take on the responsibility of giving our best. This implies caring for the humanity of others and planetary life, without ceasing to cultivate one's own humanity.

And if you need to go back to the past and the experiences that allude to disenchantment with teaching, go back. But, make this return a movement like Sankofa 's: look for past references so that the present and the future are different, better, aspiring to teaching.

### **Being a Teacher means seeing the world: the beggar's lesson**

So, dear students, the symbolic return to the past with the aim of searching for what was forgotten is an essential lesson for becoming a Teacher. However, the present time, lived in the here and now, is also fundamental. Therefore, we follow our letter to you with another lesson: see the world, as it is, but also as it could be. To see its complexity, we suggest looking at its simplicity, that is, common things that often go unnoticed.

When we make the choice to teach, we also make the choice to see what is taken as trivial, seeking meaning in the simplest everyday things. Therefore, we find meaning in everything that can teach us more about ourselves, others and the complex tripartite relationship



that forms between us, others and the place we occupy on earth. Let's go, then, to one of those recurring everyday cases, which we already take for granted: a beggar.

It is nothing new that there are, at the doors of universities, churches, at traffic lights, on city streets, on public transport, etc., people asking for alms. We can say that there is no surprise, being a predictable fact (and in some places, an already expected fact) in the context of existing social inequality. Of course, you must be asking yourselves: what does this fact teach anyone who wants to be a Teacher? After all, many think, it is not a classroom or a school, much less the exam curriculum or teaching techniques.

Truth: the beggar's lesson has no direct relationship with teaching as a technique. And here we find an opportune moment to present the argument that Being a Teacher goes beyond technique, being also – and even more important – art. Art of giving your best to care for the humanity of others, while cultivating your own humanity. Therefore, the beggar's lesson is a lesson in teaching as an art, as it involves Human Beings and has to do with forgotten, lost or simply ignored humanity.

Thus, this recurring situation of beggars leads us to a tripartite lesson that involves three attitudes: (i.) caring, (ii.) having empathy, and (iii.) caring. This does not mean reacting immediately to any and all beggars, in any context; after all, the reaction does not imply learning, and is often just a reflex. On the other hand, we cannot just react on impulse, without extracting knowledge from the situations that surround us. That's why we say that being a Teacher means seeing the world.

With a beggar, we can learn to care about the social inequalities that kill, about others who are cold and hungry, about others who suffer from an economic system that segregates those who have from those who do not, with the planet as the home of life. Caring also implies caring about yourself, but, obviously, not as mere selfishness, as each of us is part of an individual, collective and systemic ecology.

Following the lesson, another attitude that we can learn from the beggar is to have empathy. For us, empathy according to the meaning given by Rogers (1997), of feeling the anxieties or fears of the other as if they were our anxieties or fears, however, without judgement, just feelings. The attitude of having empathy cannot be confused with being condescending; It's not about looking down on others, in a paternalistic way; It's about the humility of putting yourself in someone else's shoes, feeling their pain and sharing their doubts, without any type of value judgment.



The third part of the beggar's lesson is the attitude of caring, which calls us to look at an essential aspect of teaching, sometimes even silent: caring for each other, above all safeguarding oneself and others from planetary tragedies, which, in fact, there are many: unemployment, food crises, migration crises, ecological crises, among others. See that the words of Paulo Freire (1996, p. 34) best summarize what it means to be a teacher in this context of caring: “[...] human hands, that work and transform the world. [...] Fighting for the restoration of their humanity, whether men or people, they will be trying to restore true generosity”.

With this tripartite lesson, dear students, we want to emphasize that the humanization of planetary life is the basis of Being a Teacher. However, it is not possible to humanize human lives and safeguard planetary life without authentic humanism, understood here, once again returning to Freire (2005, p. 97) as the “[...] awareness of our full humanity, as condition and obligation: as situation and project”. This notion of humanity as a condition and obligation can be basically understood as a set of attitudes marked by affection, dedication, involvement and commitment to others, to planetary life and to oneself.

Again, we cannot forget what Paulo Freire (1996, p. 15) always said: “the awareness of the world and the awareness of oneself grow together and in direct proportion; one is the inner light of the other, one committed to the other. The intrinsic correlation between conquering oneself, becoming more oneself, and conquering the world, making it more human, is evident”. By this we mean that becoming aware of one's own humanity, along with the awareness that Being a Teacher means leaving a “mark” in the direction of the integral human development of others, and in the way of caring for planetary life. It is, therefore, a fundamental exercise that must be part of the daily life of anyone who wants to embrace teaching.

Seeing the world, that is, looking closely at everyday life, is understanding the present time and, more importantly, the teaching role in reconfiguring the world. The beggar's tripartite lesson helps us understand this reconfiguration even better, as it directs us to fundamental attitudes for planetary life: caring, having empathy and caring.

### **Being a Teacher means being realistic, but dreaming about the future: in the end, the lesson of hope**

With Sankofa, we learn that the past is a place of memories that can be returned to in search of what has been forgotten. With the lamentable scene of the beggar, who has to beg for his stay on the planet, we learn that the present time of the lived world is like a mirror that reflects what we have clearly. Hence the question: what future are we building for teaching?

Let's be realistic, yes, in relation to the context that concerns the relationship of many of you, dear students, with degree courses and teaching: there are so many reasons to leave the course and many others to refuse teaching.

Well, this realistic vision is a warning, which draws our attention to the future of education itself. It worries us, of course, because our job is to train teachers and, if there are no people aspiring to teach, our work remains null and void. But, let's go far beyond this individual concern, because it isn't. It is about reflecting on a possible future without schools as we have known them for centuries, or schools without teachers, perhaps as advocated by teaching machines in the 1960s by Skinner (1972), or by artificial intelligence *bots*, as has been circulated in the media recently<sup>5</sup>— whether fact or *fake*, there is no denying the popularization of automated systems in all spheres of life, dictating the rules.

The world we have today, despite surviving the pandemic caused by Covid-19, which placed us in a quarantine of social isolation for practically two years and which claimed millions of victims around the globe, is an apathetic world. We don't experience affection, because we don't have time for that. We don't teach people how to be citizens, because we have no idea what that is. We know, on the other hand, what should not be a condition of our profession: preparations for tests, the exaltation of competition for the *best* jobs or the *best* universities, exhausting school work, which exhausts students and teachers, pitting us against each other. the others...

Then they tell us: but the world is like this, therefore, we must inspire students to *succeed* in life, giving them tools (often, which we don't even know how to use). And they say: “anyone who doesn't succeed is because they didn't try hard enough”, or were incompetent. They never say: wouldn't a world without competition be better?

When we raise this doubt, they call us utopians, socialists, communists, leftists... this is because there is, apparently, no other way of understanding the world and, who knows, wanting it to be, effectively, different. For our part, we work hard to achieve this: we fight against the electronic systems that overload us with unnecessary bureaucratic services, we face the inert curricula that will be charged in external exams, we fight for a humane education, in which students can use their first names instead to be labeled by their registration number... Therefore, we appeal to you, dear undergraduate students.

Still taken by the esteem and hope that you, students of undergraduate courses, can increasingly discover the nobility of what it means to be a teacher, we resume, in a few words,

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<sup>5</sup> For example: <https://apublica.org/2020/04/laureate-usa-robos-no-lugar-de-professores-sem-que-vamos-saibam/>  
RIAEE – Revista Ibero-Americana de Estudos em Educação, Araraquara, v. 19, n. 00, e024141, 2024. e-ISSN: 1982-5587.  
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the intentionality of this letter imbued in a phrase by António Nóvoa (2023, p 5): “A bird does not fly in water. A fish doesn’t swim on land. A teacher is not trained in current university environments, nor in mediocre and uninteresting school environments.”

Despite the fundamental importance and pertinence of this argument, it is important to consider the ancient Chinese proverb: “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach a man to fish and he will feed himself for a lifetime.” In the context of popular wisdom, this proverb often appears like this: it is not enough to give fish, you need to teach how to fish.

In one way or another, both ideas are in harmony and imbued with a sense of responsibility. On the one hand, Professor António Nóvoa’s argument reminds us of the nation’s responsibility for policies that value, encourage and provide conditions for teacher training; on the other, the Chinese proverb should resonate, as does this letter, as an invitation to you to engage in teaching. There is a very subtle relationship here: just as a teacher is not trained in mediocre and uninteresting university and school environments, interesting university and school environments are not capable of training those who do not want it as a profession to teach. This implies that becoming a teacher is an exercise that no one can do for another.

Insisting on the movement to become a teacher is our desire, which remains firm and which exists and resists even in mediocre and uninteresting conditions. But always daring to transform them. Therefore, we would like to suggest to you, dear students, that you do not lose courage, joy, hope and your dreams. Here, perhaps, is one of the wise rules we advise you: do not allow your dreams to decline, with patience, creativity and resistance; dare to live these dreams.

Returning again to Freire (1996, p. 25), we recognize that: “there is no teaching without teaching, the two explain each other and their subjects, despite the differences that connote them, are not reduced to the condition of objects, one of the other”. From this dialogical relationship presented by the master, we dare to say that there is no teaching without more people wanting to become teachers. Furthermore, we understand that without teaching, we will not be able to create a more human, happier world.

Therefore, dear students, dare to be Teachers. Always be bold, because without such an attitude a happy future will not be possible; In fact, without you, we may not even have a future. A society that does not train teachers has no future prospects.

With attention, commitment and hope, we subscribe.

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