

Learning equity in contexts of social vulnerability: challenges for teacher education^I

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Abstract

This article discusses how social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher education intersect in the production of educational inequalities in Brazil. Grounded mainly in Castel, Fraser, and Giroux, it argues that expanding access to schooling has not resolved disparities in the real conditions for learning, particularly for students in situations of social vulnerability, whose weakened labor ties and social recognition shape their school trajectories. Data from INEP, IBGE, and OECD highlight persistent gaps between social groups and indicate that educational policies must adopt equity as a central guiding principle. Teacher education is argued to require a critical, political, and reflective foundation, capable of preparing teachers as transformative intellectuals, attentive to their students' concrete conditions. The study highlights that teachers' own condition can be read through Castel's concept of a "zone of vulnerability," extending a framework usually applied to students to examine the proletarianization of teaching work. The article concludes that promoting learning equity requires revising school practices and strengthening teacher education processes that value teachers as political agents of education. Although centered on the Brazilian context, the discussion resonates with similar challenges faced by other Latin American countries.

Keywords: Educational policy; intersectionality; recognition; school inequality; teaching.

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Equidade de aprendizagem em contextos de vulnerabilidade social: desafios para a formação de professores

Resumo

Discute-se como vulnerabilidade social, equidade de aprendizagem e formação docente se articulam na produção das desigualdades educacionais no Brasil. A partir de um estudo bibliográfico fundamentado sobretudo em Castel, Fraser e Giroux, o texto sustenta que a ampliação do acesso à escola não resolveu as diferenças nas condições reais de aprender, sobretudo entre estudantes em vulnerabilidade social, cuja fragilização das relações de trabalho e de reconhecimento social se reflete nas trajetórias escolares. Dados do INEP, IBGE e OECD evidenciam a distância entre grupos sociais e apontam a necessidade de que as políticas educacionais assumam a equidade como eixo central. Defende-se que a formação docente se constitua em perspectiva crítica, política e reflexiva, capaz de preparar o professor como intelectual transformador, atento às condições concretas de seus estudantes. Destaca-se, nesse percurso, que a própria condição docente pode ser lida pela chave da “zona de vulnerabilidade” proposta por Castel, deslocando um conceito habitualmente aplicado aos estudantes para pensar a proletarização do trabalho docente. Conclui-se que promover equidade de aprendizagem exige revisar práticas escolares e fortalecer processos formativos que valorizem o professor como agente político da educação. Ainda que centrado no Brasil, o debate dialoga com desafios semelhantes de outros países latino-americanos.

Palavras-chave: Desigualdade escolar; docência; interseccionalidade; política educacional; reconhecimento.



Equidad de aprendizaje en contextos de vulnerabilidad social: desafíos para la formación docente

Resumen

Se discute cómo vulnerabilidad social, equidad de aprendizaje y formación docente se articulan en la producción de las desigualdades educativas en Brasil. Fundamentado sobre todo en Castel, Fraser y Giroux, el texto sostiene que la ampliación del acceso no resolvió las diferencias reales de aprender, sobre todo entre estudiantes en vulnerabilidad social, cuya fragilización de los vínculos laborales y del reconocimiento social se refleja en sus trayectorias escolares. Datos del INEP, IBGE y OCDE evidencian la distancia entre grupos sociales y la necesidad de que las políticas educativas asuman la equidad como eje central. Se defiende que la formación docente se constituya desde una perspectiva crítica, política y reflexiva, capaz de preparar al profesor como intelectual transformador, atento a las condiciones concretas de sus estudiantes. Se destaca que la propia condición docente puede leerse desde la clave de la “zona de vulnerabilidad” propuesta por Castel, desplazando un concepto habitualmente aplicado a los estudiantes para pensar la proletarización del trabajo docente. Se concluye que promover la equidad de aprendizaje exige revisar las prácticas escolares y fortalecer los procesos formativos que valoren al profesor como agente político de la educación. Aunque centrado en Brasil, el debate dialoga con desafíos semejantes de otros países latinoamericanos.

Palabras clave: Desigualdad escolar; docencia; interseccionalidad; política educativa; reconocimiento.



Introduction

In recent decades, the debate on the quality of Brazilian education has occupied a central place in academic and political discussions, as the country expanded access to school without managing to resolve, in the same proportion, the inequalities in learning outcomes. More children and young people entered and stayed in the school system, it is true, but this quantitative progress did not translate into equivalent learning conditions among different social groups. Understanding why this happens requires looking simultaneously at three intertwined phenomena: social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training, especially in a country whose inequalities have deep structural and historical roots.

Authors who study social vulnerability point out that the economic, cultural, and relational conditions of certain groups directly shape their possibilities of social and school insertion (Castel, 1997; Fraser, 2007). Meanwhile, the literature on learning equity shows something more uncomfortable: school inequalities not only mirror broader social inequalities, but frequently intensify them (Bourdieu, 1998; Dubet, 2012). This presents the school with a dual challenge: to cease operating as a mechanism of social reproduction and to actually guarantee the appropriation of knowledge by all.

It is at this point that teacher training gains strategic weight. The way each teacher understands the world, their profession, and their students defines their classroom practice and, by extension, the real learning opportunities offered to students in situations of vulnerability. Freire (1996), Giroux (1997), and Imbernón (2009) converge on one point: training teachers cannot be reduced to the mastery of techniques; it is necessary to cultivate a critical and reflective stance capable of confronting inequalities and expanding social justice within the school.

The general objective of this text is to analyze theoretical contributions regarding social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training, mapping



tensions, convergences, and conceptual limits among these three fields. To this end, it seeks to characterize social vulnerability as a factor that permeates school trajectories; to investigate the limits of current Brazilian learning equity policies; and to reflect on how teacher training can contribute to addressing educational inequalities. The question guiding this investigation is: in what way do these three elements relate to each other in the production, and in the possible confrontation, of educational inequalities in Brazil? Seeking this answer implies crossing classic and contemporary references with recent educational indicators in an attempt to understand their implications for teaching practice in contexts marked by inequality.

The text that follows does not intend merely to describe data, but to build a critical analysis capable of engaging with the educational asymmetries that still persist in Brazil. Although the analysis developed here takes the Brazilian scenario as its reference, the mechanisms discussed—the social fragilization described by Castel (1997), the limits of equity policies, and the precariousness of teacher training—find parallels in other Latin American countries, a region that UNESCO (2020) identifies as having the highest socioeconomic inequality in the world, which places the Brazilian case as a particular expression of a broader educational challenge in Latin America.

Methodological Approach

This is basic research aimed at producing conceptual knowledge without the intention of immediate practical application. Its character is also exploratory: the purpose is to expand the understanding of how social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training relate to one another, examining the subject through different analytical angles (Prodanov; Freitas, 2013).

A bibliographical study was chosen as the technical procedure, a method that, according to Marconi and Lakatos (2017), investigates already available secondary sources on a given topic, subjecting them to systematic examination. The authors mobilized in this work were not chosen at random: they stemmed



from readings already conducted throughout the graduate program, were selected for their relevance to the fields of sociology of education, social justice, and teacher training, and dialogue with studies previously mapped in the literature review that grounds this research. The selection of the theoretical corpus obeyed three criteria. First, the centrality of the authors in their respective fields: Castel and Fraser are consolidated references in studies on vulnerability and social recognition; Bourdieu, Dubet, and Saviani, in Brazilian and French debates on inequality and the role of the school; Freire, Giroux, and Imbernón, in the critical literature on teacher training. Second, the recurrence of these works in Brazilian and Latin American literature on school inequality, which turned them into natural interlocutors of an already consolidated debate in the field. Third, the analytical complementarity among the frameworks, enabling the intersection between structural readings of inequality (Castel, Bourdieu, Fraser) and readings focused on pedagogical and formative action (Saviani, Dubet, Freire, Giroux, Imbernón). Based on this material, the references were organized into thematic axes, allowing the identification of convergences, tensions, and limits among the different authors. This organization gave rise to the three sections that structure the following discussion: social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training. This selection does not intend to exhaust the theoretical production on the three fields, but rather to compose a coherent and sufficient analytical framework for the objectives of this study.

Theoretical Discussion

This section articulates theoretical contributions regarding social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training, highlighting not only their convergences, but also an internal tension within the discussion on equity: between Bourdieu's reproductionist reading and Dubet's commitment to the individualization of pedagogies, a tension that helps position the role of teacher training.



Social Vulnerability

In recent years, Brazil has been recording a decline in extreme poverty. According to IBGE (2023), the share of the population with household per capita income below the poverty line decreased from 31.6% in 2022 to 27.4% in 2023. This datum is positive, but it should not obscure the fact that a portion of the population still lives on around R\$ 209 per month per capita, sufficient to configure extreme misery. Given this, it is necessary to question the role of public school: to what extent does it actually offer real learning conditions to vulnerable students, since simple access does not guarantee effective appropriation of knowledge?

There is a close relationship between social vulnerability and educational deprivation. In 2024, only 56.0% of people aged 25 or older had completed at least upper secondary education, a stage considered compulsory basic education (IBGE, 2024). That is, little more than half of the Brazilian adult population completed the minimum expected schooling. The remaining 44% tend to face structural conditions that aggravate both job precariousness and the fragility of social ties, characteristics of what Castel (1997) calls the *zone of vulnerability*, a situation in which economic hardship alone does not explain all the complexity involved.

For the author, vulnerability results from a “double process of detachment: in relation to work and in relation to relational insertion” (Castel, 1997, p. 23), indicating that insufficient schooling acts as one of the factors that intensify both instability regarding labor aspects and the fragility of social supports. On the work axis, Castel distinguishes three possible situations: stable work, precarious work, and absence of work.

On the relational axis, he distinguishes strong insertion, relational fragility, and social isolation, combinations that generate three zones:

the zone of integration (stable work and strong relational insertion, which always go together), the zone of vulnerability (precarious work and fragility of relational supports), and the zone of marginality, which



I prefer to call the zone of disaffiliation to clearly mark the amplitude of the double process of detachment: absence of work and relational isolation (Castel, 1997, p. 23).

A person in a situation of social vulnerability, therefore, is someone whose ties—both professional and personal—are in some way weakened, with a concrete risk of slipping into marginality. It is precisely against this risk that many Brazilian families struggle daily, often placing in school the hope of breaking this cycle. The school acts upon two of the axes pointed out by Castel (1997), influencing school trajectories and, further ahead, chances of insertion into the labor market, which makes it an important protective factor.

OECD numbers (2025) confirm this argument: in Brazil, those who complete higher education earn, on average, 148% more than those with only completed upper secondary education—a difference well above the OECD average of 54%. This means that keeping children and adolescents in school through higher education considerably expands their chances of qualified insertion into the labor market and better salaries.

The Brazilian scenario, however, is moving in the opposite direction: the number of school dropouts has not decreased over the last two years, and the country currently has 9.1 million young people aged 15 to 29 who left school without completing basic education (IBGE, 2023). Dropout is a double concern: it not only increases exposure to precarious work, but also breaks relational ties built in the school environment. Those who abandon school, therefore, run a redoubled risk of slipping into the zone of marginality.

There is also a relational dimension that remains little explored: the school can serve as a space for building community ties. It is not uncommon for grandparents, parents, and children to have studied at the same institution, strengthening the sense of belonging. But this only materializes if the school community treats families horizontally. Fraser (2007) calls this dynamic *recognition*: a dimension of social justice that breaks status hierarchies capable of excluding certain groups from collective life.



Understanding recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural valuation according to their effects on the relative position of social actors. If and when such patterns constitute actors as partners, capable of participating as equals with other members in social life, then we can speak of reciprocal recognition and status equality (Fraser, 2007, p. 108).

This type of reciprocity offers the school community an extra layer of protection against the risks of marginality. However, the ideal does not always materialize for various reasons, including gender and racial discrimination that erode institutionalized patterns of cultural valuation (Fraser, 2007). The theme of dropout returns here with a revealing datum: of that same contingent, 71.6% were Black or Brown (IBGE, 2023).

Fraser's (2007) recognition comes into tension, further on, with Saviani's reading of the school's function as the transmission of elaborated knowledge (Saviani, 1991, 2000): while the former emphasizes status and the symbolic participation of subjects in social life, the latter focuses on the appropriation of systematized knowledge as a condition for humanization. This tension has consequences for the very design of learning equity: a policy guided by Fraser would tend to prioritize mechanisms of recognition and symbolic participation of historically undervalued groups; a policy guided by Saviani would prioritize ensuring that all students, regardless of their origin, have effective access to systematized content. These are not mutually exclusive projects, but the emphasis of each shapes concrete choices regarding curriculum, evaluation, and teacher training.

The argument indicates that misrecognition is one of the pathways leading to social vulnerability, with subjects treated as "inferior, excluded, completely 'the others', or simply invisible" (Fraser, 2007, p. 108). Far from being a coincidence, this invisibility falls upon groups that share specific social markers, systematically positioned at a disadvantage in power structures.



Collins and Bilge (2021, p. 16) offer an analytical key to understanding this overlap of disadvantages:

intersectionality investigates how intersectional power relations influence social relations in societies marked by diversity, as well as individual experiences in daily life. As an analytical tool, intersectionality considers that categories of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, ethnicity, and age group, among others, are interrelated and mutually shape each other. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining the complexity of the world, of people, and of human experiences.

Under this intersectional lens, it becomes clear that social vulnerability does not affect the population randomly: it falls more heavily upon historically disadvantaged groups in power relations, such as Black, Indigenous, disabled individuals, or those belonging to impoverished strata (Collins; Bilge, 2021). School can play a dual role: a space for social integration (Castel, 1997), recognition (Fraser, 2007), and a break from the idea that school failure is exclusively an individual responsibility, moving toward considering different living conditions as part of the learning equation. Fulfilling this role, the school helps distance individuals from the zones of marginality described by Castel (1997) and reduce the social injustices mapped by Fraser (2007), although this potential depends, in the final analysis, on the learning opportunities that the school actually provides. Understanding how the school recognizes, welcomes, and distributes these opportunities is what makes discussing learning equity specifically urgent.

Learning Equity

The previous section situated social vulnerability as a condition of fragility in labor relations and social ties (Castel, 1997), added to the lack of recognition as a legitimate part of the social body (Fraser, 2007). It is from this foundation that learning equity comes to be discussed here. In Brazil, this equity has been inferred indirectly through the results of the SAEB (Basic Education Assessment



System), an instrument that does not measure equity directly, but allows us to see performance inequalities among distinct social groups.

These indicators function as a proxy: a way to estimate the extent to which the school actually manages to offer real learning conditions to students with different socioeconomic profiles. As INEP itself points out, the purpose of Saeb is to support the formulation, reformulation, and monitoring of public educational policies, enabling different governmental levels to evaluate the quality of education practiced in the country (INEP, 2023). Among these policies is FUNDEB (Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education and the Valorization of Education Professionals). The 2020 reformulation of FUNDEB brought changes that directly affect this discussion, as the law provides 2.5 (two whole and five tenths) percentage points [...] to public networks that, upon fulfilling conditions, achieve progress in enrollment indicators and learning improvement with reduction of inequalities (Brasil, 2020, art. 14).

In practice, this reduction of inequalities is measured by the increase in the proportion of vulnerable, Black, Brown, Indigenous, and low-socioeconomic-status students, as measured by INSE, who achieve adequate performance (INEP, 2025b). This very design of the indicator, which crosses race and socioeconomic status in the same measure of equity, reflects, in public policy practice, the same intersectional logic discussed previously: learning vulnerability does not stem from a single isolated social marker, but from the overlap among them. Even so, the percentage points guaranteed via FUNDEB do not exhaust the problem: there is a significant portion of students who need to advance in their knowledge, which leads us back to a broader question: what, after all, is the role of education?

Saviani (2000, p. 17) offers an answer that helps position this discussion:

educational work is the act of producing, directly and intentionally, in each singular individual, the humanity that is historically and collectively produced by the ensemble of men. Thus, the object of education concerns, on the one hand, the identification of the cultural elements that need to be assimilated by individuals of the human species so



that they become human and, on the other hand and concurrently, the discovery of the most appropriate ways to achieve this goal.

This confirms that the right to education should not depend on the singular characteristics of each student; everyone has the right to learn in a way that respects their particularities and living conditions. The school only fulfills its function when it guarantees this learning for all; and it is precisely this that, despite governmental efforts, the results show is not happening.

The 2023 SAEB figures confirm this stagnation: in the early years of primary education, at least a return to pre-pandemic levels was expected, which did not occur; in the final years of primary education, there was a drop of two percentage points compared to the previous cycle; and, in upper secondary education, Mathematics results reached levels considered critical (INEP, 2023).

The picture worsens when looking at the regional distribution: only 1,403 Brazilian municipalities, 25.19% of the total, were qualified to receive the VAAR (Student-Year Value by Result) for meeting the criteria for reducing social and economic inequalities (INEP, 2023). In other words, most of the country still teaches poorly, and students in social vulnerability carry the heaviest burden of this failure. Bourdieu (1998) helps us understand the historical origin of this problem: by reconstituting the expansion of educational systems from the 1950s onward, when groups previously excluded from school began to integrate into it, the author describes the emergence of a “school game of social categories” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 220).

According to him, the initial enthusiasm of this massive entry into school life soon collided with a realization: being in school did not guarantee access to the most privileged positions in society. In response, the educational institution began to spread the idea that “school failure is no longer, or not solely, attributable to personal—that is, natural—deficiencies of the excluded” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 220), shifting the responsibility for school (un)success onto the subject themselves.



Arroyo (1997, p. 13) reminds us that this democratization, initiated in the 1950s, was an important step, but insufficient in itself:

some educators and administrators of the school system may judge that it would be sufficient to fight for a school that promoted the insertion of the working classes into the modern world or that made their survival in industrialized society less difficult, or even that facilitated their struggle to obtain a better job, to improve their lives.

After all, what is the purpose of being in school? For families and students, the expectation was social mobility and an exit from poverty; for the State, the goal was to train “efficient female workers for economic development” (Arroyo, 1997, p. 13). Neither of the two promises was fully kept, which led Bourdieu (1998, p. 221) to a harsh realization:

the school institution tends to be increasingly considered, both by families and by the students themselves, as a deception, the source of an immense collective disappointment: that kind of promised land, similar to the horizon, which recedes as one advances toward it.

The promise of a “school for all” remains alive, even if today disguised in the discourse of learning equity. For Saviani (1991, p. 19), the function of the school is “to provide the acquisition of instruments that enable access to elaborated knowledge,” an access that allows the individual to appropriate what humanity has produced throughout history. Learning is not, therefore, accumulating loose information, but participating, with intentional pedagogical support, in systematized scientific culture.

Learning equity, in this sense, is redefined: it is realized when the school manages, intentionally, to guarantee all students, especially the most vulnerable, real conditions for the appropriation of knowledge. It is not about leveling results, but about ensuring that pedagogical strategies take into account background inequalities and open concrete pathways of access to knowledge. Equity, here, is a social function of the school, not a spontaneous byproduct of the educational process.



Dubet (2012, p. 24) describes the mechanism sustaining this reproduction:

the “function” of school reproduction is an invariant of modern societies, which need to find in school verdicts, ratifying people’s skills and merit, the justification for social hierarchies produced by school inequalities. Consequently, reproduction would pass, first, through the transformation of social inequalities into school inequalities of the same extent and, then, of school inequalities into social inequalities, in an identical circuit of repetition.

This vicious circle explains why guaranteeing access to school knowledge does not, by itself, guarantee its effective appropriation, nor that this appropriation, even when it occurs, is sufficient to alter positions in an unequal society. To break this cycle, Dubet (2012, p. 42) argues that school systems need to individualize pedagogies, preventing the homogenization of knowledge from excluding precisely those who, due to social vulnerability, learn at different paces and in different ways.

It is worth making explicit the tension between these two readings. For Bourdieu (1998), the school reproduces social inequalities because it treats as equal subjects who arrive at it in unequal conditions, converting background differences into verdicts of individual merit; the way out, in this key, would require altering the very structures of cultural capital distribution, something that goes beyond the reach of the educational institution. Dubet (2012), on the other hand, without denying this structural diagnosis, bets on a solution located within the school: the individualization of pedagogies, which recognizes different learning paces and forms without relinquishing a common foundation of knowledge. The two readings are not incompatible, but operate at different scales: one points to the structural limits of the educational institution in the face of social inequality; the other, to possible margins of pedagogical action within those limits. It is within this margin that teacher training gains practical relevance. These implications are not merely academic: they directly reflect on the equity policies discussed in this section. Instruments such as FUNDEB and VAAR, by conditioning resources on the reduction of learning inequalities,



operate in Dubet's key: they bet that pedagogical action within the school, although insufficient to alter the structures of cultural capital distribution, can produce measurable progress. Bourdieu's critique, in turn, warns of the risk that these instruments, by measuring and rewarding results, end up naturalizing as "merit" what continues to be, to a large extent, the effect of unequal initial social conditions.

Ultimately, learning equity is not reduced to guaranteeing access and retention in school: it requires creating real conditions for everyone to appropriate the knowledge historically produced by humanity. This means recognizing, in pedagogical practices, that differences in social origin, cultural capital, and life trajectory decisively influence the possibilities of learning, without this justifying giving up a common foundation of knowledge.

In practice, this implies offering real opportunities for intellectual participation, respecting distinct learning conditions, but starting from the principle that everyone has the right to access the knowledge that underpins human formation. Equity, thus, puts pressure on school organization itself, calling upon it to rethink practices, expectations, and ways of teaching so that the promise of learning, made so many decades ago, is finally fulfilled. In daily practice, this requirement falls upon those who work in classrooms: it is teachers who need to translate, into concrete actions, the project of a school that does not reproduce the inequalities that run through it. It is this turning point that opens the way for the debate on teacher training.

Teacher Training

The 2024 School Census revealed an oscillation in the number of teachers in Brazil: from 2,354,194 in 2023 to 2,367,777 in 2024 (INEP, 2025a). The variation is small, but it already signals a trend that tends to deepen. UNESCO (2025) helps us understand why: high population growth combined with the massive expansion of educational systems in many countries has led to a relaxation of entry standards into the teaching profession, with a negative effect on its



prestige and appeal to more qualified candidates. At the same time, working conditions worsened in various contexts, as more overcrowded classrooms, unappealing salaries, and heavy workloads discouraged retention in the career (UNESCO, 2025, p. 67).

Arroyo (1997, p. 43) had already posed this question directly and uncomfortably: “the teacher has always been held accountable for the failure of the school and its low productivity. Whenever there is a thought of revitalizing the failed school, the thought is to qualify its teacher, to train them. Would we be repeating old ways out?”

Thinking about teacher training therefore requires going beyond the isolated figure of the teacher: like social vulnerability and learning equity, this training is also embedded in a broader socio-historical context. This context is also crossed by the massive expansion of schooling in recent decades, which considerably broadened the profile of candidates for teaching, with ambivalent effects: on one hand, greater participation of women in the profession in various contexts; on the other, the weakening of the presence of teachers with solid professional training, the fall in remuneration and social status, and support systems overburdened beyond their capacity.

Giroux (1997, p. 158) calls this decline in remuneration and social status the “proletarianization of teaching work,” a phenomenon with concrete material roots. Imbernón (2009, p. 14) describes its scope:

in many parts of this planet, little can be done, as many teachers are still today bordering on poverty. As the poet said, the cultural level of a country is proven by the salary of its teachers. And many countries have an excessively low cultural level, with their poorly paid teachers.

This proletarianization, it is worth noting, does not affect the teaching category uniformly: teaching in Brazilian basic education is a predominantly female profession, which places the weakening of its remuneration and status also within an intersectional key (Collins; Bilge, 2021), crossing gender and class in the historical devaluation of teaching work.



Returning to Castel's (1997) concept, it is possible to view the teaching profession itself as situated today in a position of fragility, whether due to low remuneration or the progressive loss of professional recognition. These factors bring the teacher closer to what Castel calls the "zone of vulnerability": a weakening of social affiliation that expands the risks of job precariousness. Giroux (1997, p. 158) places this fragility at the center of the current educational crisis:

the recognition that the current crisis in education has much to do with the growing tendency toward the disempowerment of teachers at all levels of education is a necessary theoretical precondition for them to effectively organize and establish a collective voice in the current debate. Furthermore, such recognition will have to address not only the growing loss of power among teachers regarding the conditions of their work, but also changes in public perception regarding their role as reflective practitioners.

For the author, teachers have been reduced to mere reproducers of curriculum, a role that stifles their critical and intellectual capacity—a capacity that teacher training itself should awaken. This same training, when successful, also teaches the teacher to question their own formative trajectory. Freire (1996, p. 25) describes the risk of training that fails to fulfill this role:

if, in the experience of my training, which must be permanent, I begin by accepting that the trainer is the subject in relation to whom I consider myself the object, that he is the subject who forms me and I, the object formed by him, I consider myself a patient who receives the knowledge-contents-accumulated by the subject who knows and which are transferred to me.

A teacher trained in these molds tends to repeat the same pattern with their students, treating them as something to be shaped and ignoring that each student carries particularities, life history, and specific learning needs. Imbernón (2009, p. 35) explains why so many teachers resist continuing education itself:

perhaps one of the reasons is that transmitter-style training still predominates, with the supremacy of a theory delivered in a decontextualized manner, far from the practical problems of teachers and their context, based on an average teaching body that shares an



ever-common set of problems, even while aware that none of these things exist.

A dual picture is thus reached: on one hand, a professional increasingly fragile economically, with direct repercussions on their social status; on the other, someone subjected to training that does little to develop their critical capacity, treating them as a simple receptacle of contents disconnected from their reality. Faced with these two layers of problematization—the social place of the teacher and the training received—it is necessary to ask how the teacher effectively acts when facing vulnerable students with such diverse learning needs.

Arroyo (1997, p. 30) had already pointed out an important gap in training courses:

training courses for education professionals have spent their time going over didactic and psychopedagogical theories. Little time has been spent making explicit and theoretically deepening the various underlying conceptions of society, citizen, worker, the productive process, and the social forces that weave social formations.

This suggests that teacher training needs to go beyond explaining social dynamics; it must help the teacher recognize themselves, simultaneously, in the social place of their students and in their own. Giroux (1997, p. 197) observes that many training programs, in practice, end up preparing professionals to maintain and legitimize the same prevailing social positions without altering their structure. For him, it is the role of training institutions to help the teacher overcome the lack of “social consciousness” and assume the role that belongs to them: that of a “transformative intellectual.”

Giroux (1997, p. 199) calls this training “counter-hegemonic,” a training aimed toward a “more political, theoretical, and critical understanding of both the nature of domination and the type of active opposition it engenders.” It is this type of training that opens up space to consider new social relations and new formative paths capable of making education programs “take seriously the struggle for democracy and social justice” (Giroux, 1997, p. 199).



Imbernón (2009, p. 46) expands this horizon:

training is not only learning more, innovating more, changing more, or whatever else one wishes to add; it can be a critical movement against workplace practices such as hierarchy, abuse of power, economic misery of many teachers, sexism, xenophobia, proletarianization, individualism, etc., and promote training more aimed at combating social practices such as exclusion, segregation, racism, intolerance, etc.

It is this social sensitivity, cultivated throughout training, that allows the teacher to refine their view of students' needs and better understand their own professional role. Without it, the risk is starting, as Giroux (1997, p. 161) warns, "from the erroneous assumption that all students can learn from the same materials, classroom teaching techniques, and modes of evaluation," which renders any more equitable learning impossible.

When the teacher recognizes their own place in the world and how proletarianization has affected their social status, they also become more sensitive to the place of their students and the implications this brings for each one's learning. It is not a matter of assuming the role of a "miracle-working teacher, savior of impossible causes" (Arroyo, 1997, p. 44), but of becoming, as Giroux (1997, p. 161) proposes, "a transformative intellectual."

There is a conceptual limit here that is worth making explicit: while Castel (1997) and Fraser (2007) describe vulnerability and misrecognition as structural conditions that exceed individual action, Giroux's proposal of the teacher as a "transformative intellectual" places considerable expectation on teacher agency. This tension between structure and agency is not resolved in this text, but deserves to be named: to what extent can teacher training actually reverse processes of disaffiliation and misrecognition that have roots far beyond the classroom? The probable answer is not "yes" or "no," but a matter of scale: teacher training does not replace structural transformations in labor relations and social recognition, but it can expand or reduce, within the scope of the school, the concrete effects of these conditions on the trajectory of each student.



Concluding Remarks

This essay started from the premise that social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training cannot be understood in isolation: they are interdependent dimensions, crossed by conceptual and structural disputes that mark Brazilian education. The data compiled throughout the analysis confirm this interdependence: even with the expansion of school access, profound inequalities persist regarding retention and, above all, learning, affecting students from historically marginalized groups most severely.

Regarding the first objective—characterizing social vulnerability as a factor that permeates school trajectories—the contributions of Castel (1997) and Fraser (2007) allowed an understanding that this vulnerability combines the weakening of labor relations and social ties with processes of symbolic devaluation, which limit the full participation of certain groups in social life. Within this framework, the school appears as an ambivalent space: it can both promote integration and recognition and intensify inequalities if it fails to offer real learning conditions. The data on school dropouts, characterized by an overrepresentation of Black and Brown students, empirically confirm this intersectional reading: social vulnerability does not exert influence in a neutral manner, but is unevenly distributed according to overlapping markers of race, gender, and class.

As for the second objective—mapping the limits of Brazilian learning equity policies—the analysis showed that instruments such as SAEB, FUNDEB, and VAAR bring important elements for monitoring educational inequalities, but the existence of indicators alone does not guarantee the overcoming of asymmetries. Recent results reveal stagnation or decline across various levels of education, a sign that the right to learn continues to be denied to many students, especially the most vulnerable. The contrast between Bourdieu's (1998) reproductionist reading and Dubet's (2012) commitment to the individualization of pedagogies helps position the limits and possibilities of these policies: if the



former relativizes the reach of school action in the face of structural inequalities, the latter points to concrete margins for pedagogical intervention.

In relation to the third objective—reflecting on the contribution of teacher training to addressing educational inequalities—the theoretical frameworks indicate that this training must be grounded in critical, political, and social bases capable of establishing the teacher as an intellectual equipped to understand the historical nature of inequalities and intentionally act in favor of social justice. When this perspective is absent, a standardized and decontextualized training tends to prevail, ignoring the singular characteristics of students and ultimately perpetuating the very inequalities it should combat.

Returning to the question that guided this investigation—in what way social vulnerability, learning equity, and teacher training relate to each other in the production, and in the possible confrontation, of Brazilian educational inequalities—what emerges is a self-reinforcing circuit: social vulnerability generates learning inequalities that the school, in isolation, cannot neutralize. It is teacher training, when anchored in critical and political foundations, that holds the greatest potential to break this circuit by preparing teachers to intentionally recognize and address the concrete living conditions of their students.

As a limitation, it is necessary to acknowledge the overwhelmingly theoretical-bibliographical nature of this study, which did not incorporate primary empirical data on how vulnerable teachers and students perceive these dynamics, nor did it perform a longitudinal analysis of the indicators discussed. The selection of theoretical references, although rigorous, does not exhaust the diversity of possible approaches regarding the three analyzed axes.

For future research, it is suggested to investigate, through qualitative or mixed-methods studies, how teachers in contexts of social vulnerability perceive and reframe their own training; and to evaluate, based on longitudinal SAEB and INSE data, the effective impact of FUNDEB's conditionalities on reducing learning inequalities among different social groups.



This study thus seeks to contribute to the debate by demonstrating that learning equity cannot be understood in isolation, but rather articulated with structural dimensions of society and the concrete conditions of teaching work. It is hoped that the reflections presented here will inform future research and guide formative practices capable of strengthening the school's role as a space for knowledge production, recognition, and the democratization of learning opportunities. Although anchored in the Brazilian scenario, this text also hopes to contribute to the Latin American debate on teacher training and social justice, insofar as the dilemmas discussed here—social vulnerability, the limits of equity policies, and the weakening of teaching—traverse, with local variations, other countries in the region.

AI Use Statement

In the preparation of this manuscript, the artificial intelligence tool Claude (Claude Sonnet 5 model, Anthropic) was used to support the writing process. The tool was employed for the following purposes: textual and stylistic revision of the manuscript, identification of formatting inconsistencies (standardization of institutional acronyms and citations according to NBR 10520:2023), and support in rewriting passages for greater clarity and original writing. The AI was not responsible for generating the theoretical content, data analysis, or manuscript conclusions, nor for selecting the theoretical frameworks used, which were activities under the exclusive responsibility of the authors. All content produced with the support of the tool was reviewed, validated, and fully assumed by the authors, who take full responsibility for the integrity and originality of the final text, in compliance with the guidelines of Cambridge (2023) and COPE (2023) adopted by the journal.

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