

ARTICLE

Popular pre-college courses taught by university students: political-pedagogical practices and teacher training

Luís Antonio Groppo^I 

Ana Rosa Garcia de Oliveira^{II} 

Fabiana Mara de Oliveira^{III} 

ABSTRACT

The article deals with a nucleus of the *Rede Emancipa Movimento Social de Cur-sinhos Populares* (Emancipate Network Social Movement of Popular Education), made up of students from a public university in Minas Gerais, with the purpose of understanding the processes of political formation and teacher training at this nucleus. Bibliographical research bases the field analysis of popular pre-college courses in Brazil, observing the constitutive dilemma of: the conciliation between the objective of preparing for the exams and the intention to be an instrument of popular struggle for the democratization of public higher education. Through a field research, the nucleus of *Rede Emancipa* is analyzed, with the objective of understanding such dilemmas experienced. The main results reveal the great relevance of this collective, self-managed by students for their self-training as teachers, including important political components aimed at popular mobilization for the expansion of social rights.

KEYWORDS

popular pre-college courses; political education; teacher training.

^IUniversidade Federal de Alfenas, Alfenas, MG, Brazil.

^{II}Rede Pública de Ensino de Minas Gerais, Alfenas, MG, Brazil.

^{III}Universidade Federal de Itajubá, Alfenas, MG, Brazil.

CURSINHO POPULAR POR ESTUDANTES DA UNIVERSIDADE: PRÁTICAS POLÍTICO-PEDAGÓGICAS E FORMAÇÃO DOCENTE

RESUMO

O artigo trata de um núcleo da Rede Emancipa Movimento Social de Cursinhos Populares, formado por estudantes de uma universidade pública mineira com o objetivo de compreender os processos de formação política e a formação docente desse núcleo. Uma pesquisa bibliográfica fundamenta a análise de campo dos cursinhos populares no Brasil, constatando um dilema que lhe é constitutivo: a conciliação entre o objetivo de preparar para os exames e a intenção de ser um instrumento de luta popular pela democratização da educação superior pública. Por meio de pesquisa de campo, analisa-se o núcleo da Rede Emancipa buscando compreender como tais dilemas são aí vividos. Os principais resultados registram a grande relevância desse coletivo autogerido por estudantes para sua formação docente, incluindo importantes componentes políticos voltados à mobilização popular pela ampliação dos direitos sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

cursinho popular; formação política; formação docente.

CURSILLO POPULAR POR ESTUDIANTES DE LA UNIVERSIDAD: PRÁCTICAS POLÍTICO-PEDAGÓGICAS Y FORMACIÓN DOCENTE

RESUMEN

El artículo trata de un núcleo de la *Rede Emancipa Movimento Social de Cursinhos Populares* (Red Emancipa Movimento Social de Cursillos Populares), formado por estudiantes de una universidad pública minera, con el objetivo de comprender los procesos de formación política y docente de ese núcleo. Una investigación bibliográfica fundamenta el análisis del campo de los cursillos populares en Brasil, constatando un dilema que le es constitutivo: la conciliación entre el objetivo de preparar para los exámenes y la intención de ser un instrumento de lucha popular por la democratización de la educación superior pública. Por medio de investigación de campo, se analiza el núcleo de la *Rede Emancipa*, buscando comprender cómo tales dilemas son allí vividos. Los principales resultados registran la gran relevancia de ese colectivo autogestionado por estudiantes para su formación docente, incluyendo importantes componentes políticos dirigidos a la movilización popular por la ampliación de los derechos sociales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

cursillo popular; formación política; formación docente.

THE RESEARCH

The *Rede Emancipa Movimento Social de Cursinhos Populares* (Emancipate Network Social Movement of Popular Education) began their activities in 2008 in the Greater São Paulo, with the intention of resuming the original political-pedagogical sense of “Poli Pre-college Course”, namely, to promote the access of working-class youth to university and to fight for the right to broaden the access to public higher education. The *Rede Emancipa* is currently present in all regions of Brazil and, in recent years, has become an important reference for a growing field of popular pre-college courses, based on the commitment to the access of popular youth to public universities and the mobilization of these young people in the struggle for the expansion of social rights.

The research *A dimensão educativa das organizações juvenis* (The educational dimension of youth organizations) in 2016 and 2017 investigated *Emancipa Minas*,¹ one of the nuclei of the *Rede Emancipa*. This research dealt with youth groups working in the University, focusing on their non-formal and informal educational practices and their contributions to the political education of its members. Like *Emancipa*, other student organizations of a political, cultural and religious nature have been researched by the Youth Studies Group of the *Universidade Federal de Alfenas* (Federal University of Alfenas — UNIFAL-MG), a group that congregates high school students, graduate and postgraduate members.

To research *Emancipa Minas*, field diary records were made regarding the planning activities and classes of this pre-college course. Six interviews were also conducted throughout 2017. Individuals with different forms of participation in the collective were invited to the interviews: their “founder”, three militants and two volunteers. The interview had a semi-structured character, based on a script developed to be applied in the whole aforementioned research.²

Initially, the article describes the analysis of what we call the field of popular pre-college courses in Brazil. This field was constituted during the 1990s and stood out as a social movement for education at the beginning of the current century, facing a constitutive dilemma: namely the conciliation between the goal of preparing for access exams and the intention to be an instrument of popular struggle for the democratization of public higher education.

In its last two sections, the article seeks to systematize and analyze the data collected in the field research on *Emancipa Minas*. It was also necessary to consider some questions that appeared during the field research, which are specific to this group, such as the different forms of membership of the group and the particu-

1 People interviewed will receive pseudonyms, to guarantee the anonymity of the subjects, according to procedures approved by the Ethics Committee of UNIFAL-MG. With the same objective, the municipality, the university and the local course where the field research was carried out will not be identified, being denominated, respectively, Minas Gerais municipality, University and *Emancipa Minas*.

2 Among the methodological references used for the semi-structured interview, we highlight Syzimanski (2004). For participant observation, we highlight Magnani (2009).

larities of their political-pedagogical practices. This analysis sought to understand how those dilemmas of the field of the popular pre-college courses are lived by one of them in particular, the *Emancipa Minas*. But the main results point to the great relevance of this collective, self-managed by students of higher education, for their self-training as teachers.

In this way, the article intends not only to characterize *Emancipa Minas* and the *Rede Emancipa* itself, but also to discuss the relevant contribution of the *Rede Emancipa* to the inclusion of important political components in teacher education, popular mobilization for the defense and expansion of social rights, especially public and free education, with universal access.

THE FIELD OF POPULAR PRE-COLLEGE COURSES

In January 2018, bibliographical research was developed based on the keywords “popular pre-college course” and “alternative pre-college course”. The objective was to select academic papers, published since 2000 in Brazil, which dealt with popular pre-college courses, preferably focusing on faculty, pedagogical principles and organizational structure. Part of the 31 selected texts, of which 9 covered the *Rede Emancipa*, are cited throughout this article.

The systematization of the reading of these works contributes to the understanding of what we can call the field of popular pre-college courses in Brazil. With the help of Bourdieu’s categories concerning the notion of social field,³ we can deal with: the origins of this field; its main development agents — such as precursor courses and networks; the ideals in dispute in the constitution of a *doxa* (a set of “truths” accepted by the agents of the field); the different practices in the configuration of a *nomos* (a set of practices considered as specific to the field); and the various agents in relation and dispute (in this case, student organizations, organizations linked to the black movement and the Catholic Church, public universities, governments, tendencies of leftist political parties, students of higher education who became teachers or part of the coordinating team, students of the courses, among others).

This new field of pre-college courses — the “popular ones” — would emerge and consolidate throughout the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, mainly as a response to the “[...] interests of the new groups of graduates of basic education”, that is, young people of the popular strata that have accessed and completed public high school, given its expansion since the end of the last century (Mitrulis and Penin, 2006, p. 269). The field of popular courses, on the one hand, was born in a way analogous to the field of business pre-college courses, that is, as a response, at a different historical moment, to the demand by certain social groups for higher education, after having achieved access to secondary education. On the other hand, at least at the height of their consolidation, the popular pre-college courses propose

3 The author systematized the way he uses these categories in Groppo *et al.* (2013). See also Bourdieu (1989).

other pedagogical practices, appropriate to their students, coming from the popular classes and marginalized ethnic groups, and seek to couple pedagogical to political, both by the formation of critical consciousness of the popular and black youth, as well as for fomenting social struggles. For Zago (2009, p. 1), these are “collective initiatives for the democratization of education in the country and access to Higher Education”. Not surprisingly, Oliveira (2006, p. 1) presents popular courses as a “social movement of popular education”.

The origin of the field of the popular pre-college courses tends to be identified with the construction of preparatory courses to the *vestibular* (university entrance exam in Brazil) from the end of the 1980s, by collective agents with sociopolitical guidelines more clearly directed to the promotion of popular access to higher education (Whitaker, 2010). Among these subjects, student organizations stand out, exemplarily the “Poli Pre-college course”,⁴ close to the network of pre-college courses created by a partnership between militants of the black movement and sectors of the Catholic Church (first, the Pre-*Vestibular* for Blacks and Destitute — PVNC,⁵ then the Education and Citizenship of Afro-descendants — Educafro). Very brief statements are made about community-based workshops — linked to residents’ associations (highlighting the “communities” and peripheries of the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro) - and even less about the trade union movement (Oliveira, 2006; Silva, 2017).

The constitution of this field goes through the 1990s, when it is a *doxa* and a *nomos* that combine pedagogical practices and political guidelines, especially between the pre-college courses connected with student organizations and the black movement. The pedagogical practices aim to teach young people from the former layers excluded from higher education, popular and black, to “pass the entrance exam” or to “do well in the National Examination of Secondary Education (*Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* — ENEM)”. The political guidelines revolve around the ideal of the democratization of higher education, through demands that became victorious, such as the exemption from entrance fees in vestibular and ENEM, the law n. 10.639/2003 (on the teaching of Afro-Brazilian history and culture),⁶ and social and racial quotas, as well as others that are still in the horizon of some school networks, such as universal access to public higher education, the concomitant end of access exams, and consistent policies for the permanence in universities of those young people coming from social groups and racially marginalized.

However, since its origins, it is a field with multiple actors and diverse experiences, not always fitting perfectly in the most accepted proposition, which combines pedagogical and political. There are other proponents that enter the field, disputing legitimacy, resources, teachers and students. One of the least researched ones, in

4 Created in 1987 by the *Grêmio Estudantil da Escola Politécnica da USP* (Student Body of the Polytechnic School of USP), in São Paulo.

5 Born in the late 1980s in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro.

6 This was a meeting that brought together the PVNC and the MSU, among other popular pre-college courses (Castro, 2011).

dissonance with their relative importance, especially in the Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, are community pre-college courses, linked to favela residents' associations and peripheral regions. The few references indicate the "pragmatic" character of these community colleges, more concerned with "passing the entrance exam" than with politicization. Experiences of popular courses held by municipal governments in partnership with civil society organizations seem to have been more common in the early 2000s, such as in Jandira, São Paulo State, and Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul State (Pereira, 2007; Ruedas, 2005). Two dissertations that map out coursework in two large capitals indicate the multiplicity of subjects and experiences, although many with a short life span: students and the black movement predominate, though there are also non-governmental organizations (NGOs), mothers' associations, Catholic religious institutions, spiritist movements, etc. (Bacchetto, 2003; Pereira, 2007).

It became very common to institutionalize popular pre-college courses through the university extension, in several cases supporting or even adopting the original initiative of student organizations, as is the case of the popular courses of the *Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho"* (Paulista State University — UNESP) (Nascimento, 2013). In the Minas Gerais municipality, *Emancipa Minas* received support from the Vice-rectorate of Extension of the University for two years, through an extension scholarship and help with consumables. But the University itself maintains its popular course, free of charge since 2016. Another example of a popular course created from the University's initiative is the *Pre-Vestibular* Course of the *Universidade Federal de São Carlos* (Federal University of São Carlos — UFSCar), in São Carlos, São Paulo State (Oliveira, 2006).

The different forms of institutionalization of popular pre-college courses, especially through partnerships between student bodies and the extension of the universities, also contributed to the generalization of a remarkable characteristic of the field, which was not so clear in the 1990s: their gratuitousness for students.⁷ The gratuitousness, of course, is also possible because of the voluntary nature of teaching and the granting of extension scholarships by public universities. Mendes (2011) warns about the risks of institutionalization of popular schools: in search of more financial stability and organizational support, the radical nature of the political agenda can be lost, especially when transformed into an NGO or supported by corporate foundations, government agencies and even university extension projects.⁸ Thus, while on the one hand the institutionalization of popular schools can guarantee stability and gratuitousness, on the other, there is the risk of losing its politicization with total or partial immersion in the field of socio-educational

7 Among the 17 "alternative" pre-college courses in the city of São Paulo in the 1990s, according to Bacchetto (2003), only one did not charge students any fees.

8 Even the *Rede Emancipa* sought to make use of this alternative, creating an NGO — the *Associação 19 de Setembro* (September 19th Association) — to support the movement through "fundraising" (Mendes, 2011, p. 100). However, according to Bonaldi (2015), the institutional support of PSOL and the network of social movements involved with this party are more important.

practices, a field that is basically focused on what Mendes (2011, 2012) calls “inclusion” — falling into the trap of focusing on the equalization of opportunities, rather than against the “meritocratic” structure of higher education.⁹

At the core of the praxis of popular pre-college courses, there is a contradiction that stresses the field, as well as the relationship between collective actors and the internal dynamics of each pre-college course: the emphasis on the “pedagogical”, unlinked from the political agenda, *versus* the emphasis on “political” (Mendes, 2012). The emphasis on the “pedagogic” unrelated to the political agenda tends to bring these courses closer to the field of socio-educational practices, which promote “social inclusion” through volunteering, such as “third sector” organizations and charities (Grosso *et al.*, 2013). According to Mendes (2012), the influence of diverse social forces in pre-college courses, displacing the precedence of the social fight and the “awareness” of the “inclusion”, was always strong in this field. On the other hand, the emphasis on “politics” also seeks to treat pedagogical practices as a means to politicize teachers and students of the course and, along with other actions, seeks to foment social struggles that represent the demands of the youth of the popular classes, especially the access to higher education.

In its constitution, the field of popular pre-college courses sought to approach the educational and political referential represented by Paulo Freire and by the social movements that demand rights to education. There are striking Freirean ideas such as the intentional consciousness of education and the defense that training practices should consider the concrete reality of students (Mendes, 2011; Pereira, 2007). The political agenda allows for the promotion of social struggles for education, as well as contents such as citizenship, human rights and culture, providing critical training for students (Mitrulis and Penin, 2006; Oliveira, 2006).

However, there has always been an “alternative” curriculum, that tends to grow the more the field of popular courses approaches the field of socio-educational practices (and the goal of “inclusion”). This curriculum owes less to the reference to Paulo Freire and Popular Education, and prefers keywords like “self-esteem”, socialization, preparation for the job market or inclusion in society. Mitrulis and Penin (2006, p. 265) refer to authors such as Dubet, Tedesco and Martuceli to argue that the courses should have “an educational proposal in which socialization and learning are closely linked”, providing the teacher with “a new way to see the world, to relate to oneself and to the other”. They also speak of “formation for life” and “formulation of life projects” (Mitrulis and Penin, 2006, p. 290). According to Ruedas (2005), the Popular Pre-college of Jandira, in the face of its low approval rates for public universities, chose to prioritize general education in order to raise students’ self-esteem, as well as to learn skills and abilities for life and the job market.

Works on professional and educational guidance in popular pre-college courses also follow the “alternative” curriculum route (Soares, 2007). Whitaker (2010) recommends universalizing professional guidance in popular coursework,

9 The examples of Educafro (Siqueira, 2011) and of the Alternative Pre-college Course of Petrópolis, in Manaus, Amazonas State, fit here (Mendes, 2011).

which would also allow popular youth to gain “cultural capital” to balance the dispute over access to public higher education.

Another contradiction has remained in the field of popular courses: the approach of commercial pre-college courses in the market. The *Rede Emancipa* was created in mid-2000s by subjects who demanded a “return to the origins” of “Poli Pre-college Course”, subjects who considered that this popular precursor course, with its transformation into a nongovernmental organization, dissociation with the student movement, loss of politicization of training and ever more expensive fees, became a commercial pre-college course, although at a more affordable price, aimed at a new and growing segment of the consumer market of commercial schools (Mendes, 2011).

The history of the “Poli Pre-college course”, in a way, repeats that of some other pre-college courses linked to student organizations that, born between the 1960s and 1970s, gave rise to commercial pre-college courses and prestigious private high schools. But, on the other hand, there is a novelty, since it announces a new sector of commercial courses, demanded by a public of the popular strata that see higher education like something closer to their personal and familiar projects, coming from the success of the adoption of social and racial quotas in higher education public system and the generalization of private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The data of Bacchetto (2003) on the “alternative” pre-college courses in the city of São Paulo during the 1990s show that this sector was already being formed from commercial courses to the popular classes, with some initiatives already announcing the preponderance of economic interests of its proposers.

It is a paradox, however, that quotas were one of the main guidelines of the networks of popular pre-college courses in the 1990s and 2000s, especially those linked to the black movement. It is very common among the militants of the *Rede Emancipa* the slogan that the goal of the pre-college course is the end of the need for the course — an emphasis on the social struggle for universal access to public higher education.¹⁰ It is revealing that this slogan has not been created by *Emancipa*, having been inherited, among other practices and guidelines, from agents in this field of popular courses.¹¹ In part, the slogan’s prophecy seems to be fulfilled, thanks to some fruit of the very success of the social struggles carried out by popular pre-college courses, precisely, the adoption of social and racial quotas, which create at least one more way of access to public higher education, parallel to that of “wide competition” (Marques and Queiroz, 2018). For young people who have the right to compete in this alternative path, the so-called “pre-college course effect” can make a difference, since quota policies have been accompanied by much more modest policies to increase vacancies in public universities. Popular coursework

10 According to Mendes (2012, p. 140), *Emancipa* courses “defend the disappearance of the reasons for their existence”.

11 This is what a PVNC militant said about popular courses: “[...] a day will come when the PVNC will no longer exist, because it will have reached its highest goal” (see Oliveira, 2006, p. 16).

has not won the universalization of access, but one of its victories, the quotas, has helped to make these courses unnecessary in the new context it creates, or pressures them to depoliticize. At a time when there was only “wide competition” for public universities, the “curricular effect” — that is, attendance for one or two years in prestigious business pre-college courses — could guarantee access to fractions of the middle classes. Now, the “pre-college course effect” is beginning to apply also among those who have the right to compete via quotas. For these, attendance at free or cheap pre-college courses — popular or commercial — can guarantee a good performance in access exams — exams that do not cease to exist, despite the struggle of popular pre-college courses (Whitaker, 2010).

The alternative path to higher education, without the universalization of access and the maintenance of selective exams, created the “pre-college course effect” for the youth of popular classes. In relation to the field of popular pre-college courses, this has meant a probable decline of its always unstable *doxa* — the articulation between pedagogical practices and the social struggle for the popular access to public higher education. Popular courses have been pushed to the pragmatism of community pre-college courses, as well as to the depoliticization of the courses linked to the field of socio-educational practices, yet facing competition from cheap commercial courses.

It should not be forgotten that popular pre-college courses can also be used as an instrument for accessing higher courses of private universities, as well as careers and public universities with less prestige, and even scholarships via the *Programa Universidade para Todos* (University for All Program — Prouni). An important part of the evasion or unstable frequency of the students seems to be explained by the clarification that these courses promote. Students begin to understand the real difficulties of accessing the course or HEIs initially desired. This does not necessarily lead them to give up higher education because they often reevaluate their projects and seek private HEIs or even less competitive courses in public HEIs (Bonaldi, 2015; Zago, 2009). The defense of general adoption in the popular pre-college courses of professional and educational guidance is also justified by the authors who defend it, because it can present, in a more methodical way, these alternatives to the students, that is, to “help students to adjust their aspiration levels to their real conditions”, according to Whitaker (2010, p. 295), supporting the process described by a teacher interviewed by Zago (2009, p. 16): “we often see dreams begin to adapt to reality”.

REDE EMANCIPA AND PRE-COLLEGE COURSES IN MINAS GERAIS

The field of popular pre-college courses has also been more consciously or deliberately articulated by agents who promote meetings and forums. These events or coalitions have been recorded as an important source of inspiration and political-pedagogical resources for other subjects to form new popular courses (Carvalho and Freitas, 2013; Costa and Gomes, 2017; Kato, 2011). Another deliberate form of articulation of popular pre-college courses is that nuclei are already born articulated in the form of “network” or “movement”. It seems that punctual initiatives,

in the form of “nucleus” isolated from popular pre-college courses, tend to have a shorter life, especially due to the lack of institutional and political-pedagogical support. Some seek to form networks, such as those of UNESP, with the support of the Extension Vice-rectorate (Castro, 2011). Others are born with the purpose of being networks, and are able to form even larger ones, with great influence in the field, such as Educafro. The term “movement”, as in the case of *Movimento dos Sem Universidade* (Movement of the Without University — MSU), can be used with similar intent. The *Rede Emancipa Movimento Social de Educação Popular* also inherited these intentions: its own name comprises the terms “network” and “movement”.

In the narratives of the origin of the *Rede Emancipa*, the reference is usually the *Movimento de Resgate do Cursinho da Poli* (Rescuing Movement of the Poli Pre-college Course) (Mendes, 2011). But the guidelines of *Emancipa* also seem to contain other sources, in addition to the resumption of the “purity” of the Poli Pre-college Course original project, such as the radicalization of the struggle for university access and the establishment of pre-college courses in public schools in the periphery. This is evidenced by the conflicts that arose during the attempt to re-found the “Poli Pre-college Course” in 2006 again under the protection of the Polytechnic Students’ Body. Most of the members of the Movement defended the formation of small courses in the peripheries, while the Students’ Body, in the victorious version, preferred to concentrate the activities at *Universidade de São Paulo* (University of São Paulo — USP). Among those who defended the defeated proposal, the *Rede Emancipa* would be born, involving teachers who had been dismissed from the Poli Pre-college Course, former members of the Poli Pre-college Course, students’ association, student movement militants and others. Three courses were founded in 2008 from this initiative, of which only the Chico Mendes Pre-college Course, in Itapevi, São Paulo State, survived and remained within the *Rede Emancipa* (Mendes, 2011). Today, the Network comprises about 40 courses, involving 20 municipalities and 7 states: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Norte, Pará, Federal District and Rio Grande do Sul (Carvalho, 2017).

From the point of view of the popular pre-college courses networks, the novelty of the *Rede Emancipa* seems to be the proximity of much of its coordination with a leftist political party, the *Partido Socialismo e Liberdade* (Socialism and Freedom Party — PSOL), rather than the tendency that the party should be a composition of social movements, the *Movimento Esquerda Socialista* (Socialist Left Wing Movement — MES), in particular via the youth collective *Juntos!* (Together!) (Castro, 2011). The party and its relations with social movements and unions have been an important source of organizational, ideological and political resources to the *Rede Emancipa*, from which it shares its accumulation of political-pedagogical knowledge and practices (Bonaldi, 2015). According to militants, the great cohesion of the *Rede Emancipa*, compared with other networks of popular pre-college courses, is due to the strength of the “political tool” that supports it, the MES. At the same time, the *Emancipa* courses are a source of valuable human resources for the party and the *Juntos!* to participate prominently in collective actions, such as the 2013 Days, and conquer student entities, such as the *Diretório Central Estudantil* (Student Central Directory — DCE) of USP (Castro, 2011). On the other hand,

this connection with PSOL and *Juntos!* has also been a source of tensions and conflicts within the faculty.

Zago (2009) — about teachers from popular pre-college courses in Rio de Janeiro — and Bonaldi (2015) — about teachers from an *Rede Emancipa* in São Paulo — show some of the most common characteristics of the teaching staff, which are repeated in *Emancipa Minas*: they are young students of public universities, they have surpassed the paternal and maternal school capital, they are graduates of the public school network and, among those who are deeply involved with the courses, the time of action is longer. They refer to the thesis that the involvement of the teacher with the course has a lot to do with their life story and with the social identification with the student body, although there is a number of teachers who have a more privileged social origin and school trajectory. Bonaldi (2015, p. 312) is even more specific in relation to the pre-college course of *Rede Emancipa* which he investigated, in São Paulo Capital: both students and teachers, regarding their social class, are formed by less privileged people in relation to middle-class students, but better situated in relation to most of the other youth of the popular classes, that is, they come from “privileged fractions of the popular layers”. Such identification of the faculty with the student body is expressed in the interview given by Bianca, coordinator of *Emancipa Minas*:

I see that *Emancipa* translates all my trajectory, and that is what I want, with people like me who did not have a chance to attend a pre-college course, studied their whole life in public school and had no perspective... because I had no perspective when I was in high school, I realized that ENEM existed through my friends, I found out that I could take ENEM and I could try for a vacancy. So, I want people like me, who do not have access to quality education, to be able to enter universities. (Bianca, coordinator)

Another important similarity between faculty and students is the predominance of women, close to 70% in the *Emancipa* course that Bonaldi (2015) investigated. Some data have indicated, for some years, in Brazil, more interest and effort of young women of the popular classes in schooling, both in high school and higher education (Carvalho, 2003). The partial results of the research *A dimensão educativa das organizações juvenis* have also brought to the fore the greater presence of young women in the youth organizations of the University. In several of these organizations, the predominance of women in the roles of coordination and leadership has been evident. They have also been prominent in the depth and longevity of their militancy, and so the majority of those selected for the semi-structured interviews of this research — as was the case of *Emancipa Minas* — have been young women. These findings need to be more theorized, but they seem to indicate two things. First, what feminist militancy itself has propagated: the struggle for the democratization of spaces (including within social movements) is intrinsic to the struggle for gender equity, that is, whenever a space is democratized, the outstanding performance of women increases. Second, thinking about personal projects and life trajectories: there is a greater investment of young students not only in higher education, but also in militancy or activism, especially those from social and racial

groups with a more recent presence in public universities (by the expansion of high school and through the policies of quotas). Such investments may be, among other things, ways of women demanding the achievement of relative social ascent and or economic equality in relation to the men of these same groups.

The *Rede Emancipa* are one of the examples of networks and nuclei of pre-college courses that originate and operate, basically, through the collective work, largely self-managed, of the faculty (Mendes, 2012). There are, therefore, as in many other popular courses, a group of militants that give rise to and coordinate the Network and courses — who are not necessarily activists in the *Juntos!* and/or PSOL. However, especially in larger pre-college courses, such as the *Emancipa* course researched by Bonaldi (2015), the adhesion of subjects that he and other authors call “volunteer” teachers is necessary. Volunteer teachers do not always understand or even agree with the political proposal of the popular pre-college course and their motivations can be diverse, like teaching experience and subsistence allowance (Pereira, 2007; Siqueira, 2011). Even though the militant portion does not have perennial participation in the Network, given the great transience of the student condition, the rotation of volunteer teachers is even greater, affected, for example, by the increase in the university workload or the opportunity for paid work (Bonaldi, 2015). But the various motivations, which sometimes seem to oppose volunteerism to militancy, according to Bonaldi (2015), are not only a source of turnover in popular pre-college courses, including *Emancipa*, but also generate tensions.

If the militants need volunteers to teach classes, the volunteers need the militants to organize the pre-college course, to have where to teach classes without the need to engage in coordination. In the pre-college course investigated by Bonaldi (2015), there is an attempt to synchronize, even if provisionally, the identities of the heterogeneous agents that compose the faculty, creating “a common frame of references” (framing). The framework would be composed of the horizontal and participatory nature of decisions, by reference to the popular education by Paulo Freire and by an accepted repertoire of pedagogical practices and political initiatives. There is, according to Bonaldi (2015), a tacit agreement between militants and volunteers, which creates a common ground of cohesion and cooperation: classes and activities should be politicized, but never “instrumental”, that is, there should be no party propaganda or recruitment practices. This tacit agreement, however, is not always sufficient to avoid tensions and conflicts.

In *Emancipa Minas*, Fabrícia, a volunteer who had very little involvement in the *Emancipa* political proposal, showed dissatisfaction with the militants who coordinated the collective, stating that “sometimes the ideology (of the group) is just words on paper”. On the other hand, regarding volunteers who do not agree with the political vision of *Emancipa*, Bianca affirmed that this happens more often in large schools in São Paulo, and that here there were few cases, although with similar result: “Generally, when they begin to see that the pre-college has this leftist line, these very people turn away” (Bianca, coordinator).

The relations of friendship also seem to mark the link between the militancy of *Emancipa Minas*. Daiane (coordinator) is quite emphatic, revealing that new

forms of activism require affective relationships between subjects: “If you do not have a friendship within the movement, it does not work. Relationships motivate you to build something”. Volunteers, on the other hand, are less closely related. Estela sees the relationship even as “wonderful”, reporting that she was welcomed, but has no friendships. The degree of political bonding accompanies the degree of affective bonding, it seems, since Fabrícia, who is less engaged, says that the group is “a bit closed” and that she “still could not really feel welcomed”.

The *Emancipa* seeks to differentiate itself both from the commercial pre-college courses and from courses that say they are popular but neither engage in the perspective of “awareness” of the subjects nor promote insertion into struggles for the democratization of higher education (Mendes, 2011, 2012). With this aim, in addition to the reference to popular education and Paulo Freire, they highlight their own political-pedagogical practices, especially the “circle” or “circle of *Emancipa*” — a kind of assembly or expanded round of discussion in which themes with progressive political character are debated, concerning both the struggles for the democratization of higher education and the patterns of the black, feminist, LGBTT and trade union movements etc. During the circle, several nuclei usually call militants of these movements to dialogue with the students. In the interviews with *Emancipa Minas*, the circle was cited by all members as the most outstanding activity.

We qualify ourselves, those who are mediating the circle, while the students qualify themselves collectively, critically. They bring opinions collectively, and what we take to them is information, data and knowledge, so that we have an idea of the discussion, that some fruit will come out. [...] It is a space from where people always leave very happily. (Bianca, coordinator)

Emancipa also highlights, among their own activities, “free time”, a place where students can engage in various workshops and other leisure activities offered, or just talk and rest (Carvalho, 2017). Regarding free time, Estela (volunteer) reports in her interview:

I also find interesting spaces for students, for them to talk, sometimes they talk to us, there are moments in which interesting ideas come up, as in the first week of *Emancipa*, in which the crowd was forming the students’ body.

The *Emancipa* in São Paulo also carries out activities of a specific political-pedagogical nature, for which it seeks to add people from other states, especially protest or public classes, held at the beginning of each semester, in the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (Museum of Art of São Paulo — MASP). Another attractive activity of *Emancipa* in São Paulo is the Day at USP, where, in the form of a march, students and teachers of the Network go around USP’s campus, not only presenting the university, but also claiming the demands of the Network, such as adoption of the quota policy (which only occurred in USP in 2017) and the end of college admittance exams. This activity illustrates another goal of the *Rede Emancipa*, already cited above: the incentive to engage teachers and students in collective actions. The participation of *Emancipa* in the 2013 Days, fomented by the fight against

the increase in public transport fees, is always recalled, not only in São Paulo, but also in other places, as in Marabá, Pará State (Aragão *et al.*, 2015; Carvalho, 2017).

The *Rede Emancipa* proposes as one of their goals something that could, in a way, be seen as a concession to the so-called “alternative” curriculum, presented at the beginning of the Editorial of their 10th anniversary commemorative magazine: “It is necessary to understand admittance exams (*vestibular*), formulate one’s own individual project and be part of a collective project” (Carvalho, 2017, p. 4). The concession seems to reside in the reception of the individual project, explained as “knowing the selection mechanisms and professions, but also thinking about their future, what kind of person and worker you intend to be” (Carvalho, 2017, p. 4). Reports of the militancy of *Emancipa Minas*, collected during participant observation, put forward the idea of a “Professions Fair”.

In line with this, the activities that most mobilize the subjects of *Emancipa* continue to be the classes of the pre-college course. Most of these subjects, in fact, seem to focus their main interest in such classes, including the faculty in cases of very large pre-college courses, which need to resort to large numbers of volunteer staff. The motivation of students to “pass the college admission examination” or to “do well in the ENEM” continues to have great force, although the militancy emphasizes the necessary criticism to the selective exams and the right of all to quality in public education, especially in the moments of the “circle”. There is also another source of dilemmas to *Emancipa*, narrated as a drama by Bonaldi (2015) in a large *Emancipa* course, but which replicates, albeit with particularities, in a smaller course like the one in Minas Gerais.

According to Bonaldi (2015), as previously mentioned, there is hopeful enthusiasm shared by faculty and students in the first weeks of classes. However, this environment tends to experience a shock during the year, with the growing perception of students’ lags and difficulties to pass the exams. A strong moment of this perception is the mock exam, that materialize this distance and cool off the initial enthusiasm. Both cooling and family counseling can lead to lowered expectations and the choice of private HEIs. Other consequences might be evasion or an occasional frequency, something reinforced by the need to work (Bonaldi, 2015).

SOCIAL TRAINING AND POLICY IN *EMANCIPA MINAS*

The public classes within the scope of MASP had great formative impact for two students and Ana, their professor at the University. The three of them, who later founded *Emancipa Minas*, went to the inaugural class in the opening of MASP in August 2014. The very constitution of *Emancipa Minas* was due to a sequence of training activities centered on the University in the second half of 2014, seeking, as Ana states in her interview, “to gather more people, because there were only people from the social sciences, and to plan what we were going to do”: *Emancipa Minas* presentation at the University; “Pre-ENEM Big Class” in the *Núcleo do Movimento Negro* (Nucleus of the Black Movement); participation in the event on racial quotas at the University; activity on the military dictatorship in public high school; self-organized women’s wheel against patriarchal violence; and denouncing the massacre of students in Ayotzinapa, Mexico.

By 2015, *Emancipa Minas* had about 20 members, preparing for the beginning of the popular course. First, we sought a public school in the municipality that hosted the popular pre-college course. The most receptive school was situated opposite to the University. In their reports, the founders claimed that they preferred another peripheral school, but that there was an important symbolic aspect to this choice, since many students at that school did not even know that the university opposite to it was free or that they had a real chance to study there. Next, training sessions were given by coordinators of pre-college courses in the São Paulo Network.

The inaugural class of the *Emancipa Minas* pre-college course was in April 2015, attracting 120 high school students. The theme was “Access to the city”, with the lecture by a professor from the University. There was also the reception of the school, the presentation of the team and the dynamics of the course and cultural activities. The so-called “zero class” was also in April, adopting the dynamics that would be repeated in the following weeks: classes on Saturdays, group lunch, free time and circle. In that year, the course reached its largest audience: three classes were formed, each with about 40 students.

The planning dynamics of the course and classes were repeated in 2016 and in part of 2017. In the dynamics of the classes, it should be added that, in 2016, the Children’s Space functioned, with activities to welcome children of the students of the pre-college course. Also in 2016, two classes of the pre-university course were created, repeating the tradition of other courses in the Network — one extensive (throughout the year), another intensive (in the second semester) — and, finally, a preparation for the test for the municipal teaching students.

Demand had already narrowed in 2016, with only 30 students in zero class. More than the reduction in demand, however, evasion is said to be the greatest frustration of the people interviewed, even though they understand the social and economic causes involved, as well as that it is a problem of the whole Network and characteristic of any *Educação de Jovens e Adultos* (Youth and Adult Education — EJA) program. The last classes of 2017 did not have any students at all.

Reports collected from the participant observation point to another difficulty that may be related to evasion: the incomprehension on the part of the student body of the political agenda proposed by *Emancipa Minas*. In 2017, the circles highlighted the LGBTT theme, including organizing the participation of *Emancipa Minas* in the city’s LGBTT Parade. While the volunteer teacher Fabrícia believed that the gay and lesbian activists formed a closed group, the field diaries reported sneers from secondary school students at the end of one of these circles.

While it was in operation, despite the problem of student evasion and tensions within the faculty, *Emancipa Minas* — which may be restructured in the near future, as wished by their militancy — was very important for their participants’ socio-political education and for the process of integration of their members with the University and the municipality, as the interviews attest.

For people who came from outside the municipality that houses the University, such as Carlos, Daiane and Ana herself, taking part in *Emancipa* was important as a way of integrating life in the city. But what is unanimous in the interviews is the recognition of the importance of *Emancipa* in the construction or affirmation

of a given conception of education, as well as the choice of a career in the field of education — which will be further discussed here. Different from what was initially expected, in their interviews, militants indicated average influence of the collective in other social and political issues besides education, such as politics, religion, family, race relations, gender relations and social inequality. The influence was even lower in the case of volunteer teachers.

After education in its broadest sense, the main influence reported refers to the theme “university function” — directly linked to the issue of education, as much as the political guidelines most valued by *Emancipa*. In relation to the militants, in fact, they were seen to have already militated before or concomitantly in other organizations, some focused specifically on politics, such as Bianca (in *Juntos!*) and Carlos (in PSOL, in another municipality). Daiane circulated in other student groups, although without engaging in any of them as a militant. Another example of multiple activism is that of Bianca, that besides the *Juntos!* and *Emancipa*, took part in the Maracatu group.¹² This previous or parallel experience in groups aimed more directly at student politics tended to reduce *Emancipa* influence in their political education, since they were already well qualified.

Today I feel I'm a much better person, including by really understanding what democratic values are, the need to fight for a different society, much more than the university. Since I left university, I criticize my university a lot, but *Emancipa* helped me to have more fundamentals, more discussion elements to make a debate of more quality. (Ana, former general coordinator)

Many things that I did not know, I came to know for being inside the pre-college course, mainly political discussions. Before that, I had access to political discussions, but did not know which direction to take. (Bianca, coordinator)

I think our circles tend to deal with these guidelines, different opinions and what we build. We are always dealing with the ethnic-racial issue; the gender issue is very present, against prejudice, against machismo. They have been constructive spaces. There is also the question of the university, of not just staying inside the university. We always try to bring these themes here, religion, we are always talking, and students have different religions. *Emancipa* is a formative space for these discussions. (Carlos, coordinator)

The militancy brings a lot of experience that the academic life does not bring. So I see another reality, the reality of the *Emancipa* students, the teachers. [...]. The movement sometimes contributes much more than the debates built here within the University. I can understand much more the Brazilian situation within *Emancipa* and the student movement than inside a classroom. [...].

12 Percussive group that cultivates popular tradition of Pernambuco State.

My participation in these groups completely changed my view of the university. When I came in, I thought I had to get in, train and leave. Today, I know it's a lot harder. That it is necessary to live the university, all its spaces. [...]. There's Daiane before *Emancipa* and the post-*Emancipa* Daiane. Today I am someone else. (Daiane, coordinator)

The reports above, put forward by militants, bring forth the theme of the university. The political agenda of *Emancipa*, highlighting the struggle for university democratization, appeared not only as an objective of the Network as a social movement, but also, especially in Daiane's report, as an experience transformed in its relationship with the University — in fact, Daiane brings a strong testimony of personal transformation. But she does not put much emphasis on other themes. For Ana and Bianca, *Emancipa* served more as a reinforcement of ideas and values, while Carlos highlighted the formative work of the circle more generally.

According to Estela, the social and political influence, besides education, of *Emancipa Minas* was not great either. A volunteer teacher, but with a good degree of adhesion to the political-pedagogical cause of *Emancipa*, she had already participated, as she says, “in other spaces of militancy”. In addition, she was already in the last part of her Social Sciences course. Her report highlights the importance of *Emancipa Minas* in the conception of education, as we will see later, and in reinforcing her concept of university:

The function of the university, yes, but I thought of that before, in a more democratic university, in opening the doors of the university to any kind of person, who until then could not enter, which is a task of *Emancipa*, to make people of low income and sometimes the very people who live in the same city of the university, be able to enter the university. (Estela, voluntary)

The volunteer Fabrícia affirms that *Emancipa Minas*, in relation to the social and political influence on her, “did not interfere much, because these constructions were acquired during the academic education, so it only reinforced some points”. Her report brings a great estrangement from the LGBTTT agenda, as well as dissatisfaction with what could be seen as the distance between the political discourse and the practice of the Network and *Juntos!*.

As announced, the greater unanimity found in the interviews, which is also the great influence of *Emancipa Minas* on its militants and volunteers, refers to the importance of the collective for the conception of education and for teacher training. The following accounts were collected when, at the beginning of the interview, they were asked about the importance of the collective to the life of the person interviewed. They deal with the relevance of *Emancipa* in the construction or affirmation of a certain notion of education, in the definition of teaching as a professional career and in the choice of pedagogical practices.

Even the shiest volunteer teacher confirms this importance,¹³ but this is more strongly recognized among the militants and the volunteers who best accepted the proposal of the collective:

I studied at an elite school in São Paulo, so I thought that the universities had to be democratized, but I also thought that people had to do something to deserve it. Then you will mature in discussions about the right to education. The first time I got in direct contact with Paulo Freire was through *Emancipa*, and Paulo Freire changed my conception as a teacher and, more than that, how to understand myself as a teacher of other teachers. (Ana, former coordinator)

Without *Emancipa*, I would have no contact with popular education [...] and maybe I did not have as much interest in the degree and did not even think about pursuing a career in education or a Master's in Education. [...] I graduated as an educator [...] University graduation does not guarantee that we will be a good teacher, in the sense of understanding the reality of the students, of not being a teacher who is reproducing the same structures of oppression. (Bianca, coordinator)

Emancipa was the place where I taught my first class, my first experience as a coordinator was also here. [...] *Emancipa* brought the clarity that I want to be a teacher and also tranquility to work as a teacher. (Carlos, coordinator)

Emancipa was a space that I found worth fighting for. I think that through it I can achieve my fighting goals. Through *Emancipa* I can carry out transformations through education, which I believe in very much. (Daiane, coordinator)

It is a possible utopia, it is something that I imagined in education and that I thought was very far from happening, because when we go to the internship, we see a very different reality. When we read the texts, we begin to idealize education, and suddenly we go to the public school and see that it is not so, and that is when all our ideals begin to die and we begin to lose all our ideals, our dreams with an emancipatory education. Reality is very different from theory, and when I entered *Emancipa* I began to realize that it is possible to build up an education in the way that we believe. (Estela, volunteer teacher)

As mentioned, the reports record the great influence of *Emancipa* in the construction of a notion of education based on Paulo Freire and popular education — pedagogical foundations and a horizon of political action assumed by the Network. In this aspect, the most important ones are overcoming the belief in the value of meritocracy (Ana), defending broad right to education (Ana), breaking with educational practices incapable of overcoming what Freire would call “banking edu-

13 “*Emancipa* brought some insight and knowledge about new forms of teaching” (Fabrícia, volunteer teacher).

cation” (Bianca), creating a concept of education that seeks to transform social reality (Daiane) and the resumption of an emancipatory conception of education (Estela).

Regarding the teaching career, the statements above still bring important elements. The pre-college courses, either commercial or popular, have para-school character, that is, are educational practices not officially recognized by the education systems (Nascimento, 2013). However, participation in *Emancipa Minas* gave certainty to some of the people interviewed about their professional choice, that is, that they really wanted to be teachers. Of course, Daiane was not in a teacher training course and Fabrícia says she was already defined by teaching. Strictly speaking, Estela was already following the path of teaching, but her account records the resumption of a “utopian” notion of education, after some frustrations. Ana also had a teaching career, but when she met *Emancipa* and, through it Paulo Freire, she rebuilt herself as a teacher and teacher trainer. Carlos had, with *Emancipa*, his first experiences as a teacher and coordinator. Bianca seems to have been the most affected, finally deciding for the professional field of education — as a teacher and researcher — thanks to her militancy.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this article, initially a bibliographical research selected academic texts that showed both the genealogy of the field of the popular pre-college courses, and revealed their constitutive dilemmas. Comparisons were made with similar fields, such as the field of business pre-college courses and the field of socio-educational practices. A discussion was proposed that if on the one hand commercial pre-college courses were a response to the desire of the middle classes for the access to higher education, on the other hand, popular pre-college courses have been a response to similar projects of the youths of the popular classes. This field was seen to have been constituted from the end of the 1990s, in particular by the action of university students and black movements, with less documented participation of other actors, such as community associations and unions. In order to differentiate themselves from the economic objectives of the commercial courses, the popular courses constituted a *doxa* and a *nomos*, although unstable, that congregated certain pedagogical practices (specific to its public) and political guidelines (for the democratization of public higher education).

A tension is observed in this field that is constituent of it, the result of an unresolved dilemma, about how to combine political and pedagogical practices. This dilemma has, in fact, a profound origin, originating from the very social contradictions created when populations, once left out higher education, began to see this level of education on their horizon. Individual projects of social ascension coexist with the strategy of promoting the universalization of higher education through collective actions. As seen, the *Rede Emancipa* does not hide that this contradiction is lodged in the very center of its proposal, that is, to combine the individual project with the collective struggle.

Even in the face of this dilemma, the most combative actors in the field had important victories, especially the adoption of social and racial quotas. However, the

expansion of vacancies in public HEIs fell far short of providing universal access, just as selective exams continue to work as a door (or wall) between high school and higher education. A paradoxical situation is thus drawn, in which the popular courses are threatened by the success of their own struggles, but in a transformed way to what the PVNC had already prophesied even before *Emancipa*. It constitutes a proper path for young people and ethnic black and indigenous individuals to public HEIs parallel to the wide competition. For these youngsters, popular pre-college courses can make a difference in access, that is, a “pre-college course effect” is generated in the field of popular pre-college courses, something that was once residual, but which now reinforces individualization and competition among postulants to higher education, rather than their unity in collective projects and social movements for education.

Popular pre-college courses are pushed into pragmatism — emphasis on exam preparation — and de-politicization. Nevertheless, they have to compete with a new sector of the cheaper business pre-college courses specifically targeted at this poorer public. And they continue to face severe rates of evasion or volatile participation, which does not necessarily mean the end of the desire for higher education, since in several cases it indicates the reformulation of personal projects, seeking private HEIs or courses in public HEIs with less competitors.

Next, this text interpreted the data collected in the field research with *Emancipa Minas*, a collective formed by students from the investigated University. In the analysis, we first sought to understand how this collective lived the dilemmas that are inherent in the field of popular courses. Another issue related to the general objective of the research is *A dimensão educativa das organizações juvenis*, that is, as is the social and political qualification promoted by University youth organizations, in this case, by *Emancipa Minas*.

Emancipa brings together in its name both the term “network” and “movement”, both illustrating the intention of articulating diverse nuclei and organizing them into common political-pedagogical tasks. At the same time, its nuclei, such as *Emancipa Minas*, functions largely as self-organized pre-college courses, especially regarding its coordination, with different levels of adherence to the political agenda by teachers and students.

Several are the objectives of the *Rede Emancipa*, which walk close to those of other actors in this exciting field of popular pre-college courses. More clearly, *Emancipa* projects social struggles for the rights to education, challenges the limits of the democratization of higher education, fosters popular courses in which the individual desire for university access is sought through collective projects of social transformation and promotes the training of teachers for the pre-college courses that keep alive the alternative pedagogical practices that mark the Network (circles, free time, public classes, political education and mobilization for social struggles). It is undeniable that, despite their autonomy, the *Rede Emancipa* articulate with the tendency of a leftist party, the MES, and their youth organization, *Juntos!*, in a relationship that brings some points of tension between militants and volunteers, and sometimes a certain incomprehension on the part of the students, but also guarantees relative unity

and political-pedagogical force to this Network of popular pre-college courses. In turn, *Emancipa* promotes relative social rooting of those political organizations, as well as captures new leaderships and establishes social bases for participation in mobilizations and struggles.

However, as far as *Emancipa Minas* is concerned, the observations about its pedagogical practices, as well as the reports collected in the interviews, show that the greatest merit of this collective was its great power to train both male and female educators — even the most reserved volunteer teacher acknowledged this influence. It reveals a new dimension of the self-training of university students that was also investigated by the research *A dimensão educativa das organizações juvenis*. It is about the self-training of teachers, in addition to the mere exercise of a preparatory practice before full entry into the labor market (as perhaps Fabricia's desire, as well as others who volunteer in the teaching of popular pre-college courses).

Many of the university students participating in *Emancipa* have been training themselves in teaching by cultivating *Emancipa's* pedagogical practices, as well as learning about educational management through the exercise of coordination. There is also a co-operative dimension in the collaboration between generations: it marks the origin of *Emancipa Minas*, in which University professors joined students to create the original cell of this collective in the municipality of Minas Gerais; which continued with the process of qualification of the teaching staff, with the participation of more experienced coordinators from courses in São Paulo; and perpetuated itself with the attempt of militancy to attract volunteer teachers to the causes of *Emancipa*, with varying degrees of success (more with Estela than with Fabricia, for instance).

The author and the coauthors did not expect or even wanted to watch the decline of the course held by *Emancipa Minas*, especially during 2017 and early 2018, precisely when our desire was to document a pulsating encounter between university students and teenagers of the city. This feeling should refer us to what the reality shows, illustrated by empirical research and theoretical reflections, which remind us of the volatility of youth organizations and student collectives. Other university collectives have also known their peak and emptying before our eyes during the few years of the research, just as students come to and leave university. Meanwhile, these young people, or others who arrive in new groups, create other organizations, bring new guidelines and invent other ways of acting politically, as surprising as the collective that, in wishing to promote the right to education for popular adolescents, was able to self-train teachers with a formidable conception of education and a valuable pedagogical repertoire.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

LUÍS ANTONIO GROPPPO has a doctarate in social sciences from the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP). He is a professor at Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL).

E-mail: luis.groppo@unifal-mg.edu.br

ANA ROSA GARCIA DE OLIVEIRA is a graduate in social sciences from the Universidade Federal de Alfenas (UNIFAL). She is a professor at the public education network of the state of Minas Gerais.

E-mail: anarosagarciadeoliveira@hotmail.com

FABIANA MARA DE OLIVEIRA is a master's degree student in science teaching at Universidade Federal de Itajubá (UNIFEL).

E-mail: fabianamaradeoliveira@hotmail.com

Received on May 16, 2018

Approved on March 14, 2019

