

The choice of a federal integrated high school in the Brazilian countryside: the relevance of Bourdieu's contributions¹

Escolha de uma escola federal de ensino médio integrado do interior brasileiro: a atualidade das contribuições de Bourdieu

Bruna Tatianne Moura de Queirós*
Tânia de Freitas Resende**
Débora Cristina Piotto***

RESUMO

Este artigo, situado no campo dos estudos sociológicos sobre a escolha do estabelecimento de ensino, discute a atualidade das teorizações de Pierre Bourdieu para a compreensão da escolha da escola de ensino médio, em uma pequena cidade na área do semiárido brasileiro, no estado de Minas Gerais. Mais especificamente, interroga a atualidade e a utilidade do conceito de capital cultural nesse contexto. Baseia-se em resultados de uma pesquisa sobre o processo de escolha, por jovens e suas famílias, do Instituto Federal do Norte de Minas Gerais (IFNMG) e, especificamente, do curso Técnico em Informática para Internet, integrado ao ensino médio, oferecido no *campus* Janaúba desse instituto. Os procedimentos metodológicos desenvolvidos foram: aplicação de questionários aos alunos e a seus responsáveis, realização de grupos focais com estudantes e de entrevistas com alguns deles e seus responsáveis. Os resultados apontam a necessidade de considerar, no contexto pesquisado, o conceito de capital cultural em uma acepção

Translated by: Felipe Menezes. Email: menezes-felipe@outlook.com.

* Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Norte de Minas Gerais. Janaúba, Minas Gerais, Brasil. E-mail: bruna.queiros@ifnmg.edu.br - <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9399-1824>

** Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brasil. E-mail: taniaresende@ufmg.br - <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4275-7426>

*** Universidade de São Paulo. Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, Brasil. E-mail: dcpiotto@usp.br - <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9349-0218>

¹This research is the result of a Doctoral study that had the financial support of Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Norte de Minas Gerais (IFNMG) in the form of a Doctoral scholarship to the first author.

ampla, não necessariamente ligada à alta cultura, mas mantendo a ideia de recursos culturais que representam vantagens no campo acadêmico. Nesse sentido, a pesquisa reafirma a atualidade e a utilidade do conceito de capital cultural e, especialmente, da noção de capital informacional na compreensão do processo de escolha do estabelecimento de ensino.

Palavras-chave: Escolha da escola. Ensino médio integrado. Bourdieu. Capital cultural.

ABSTRACT

This article, in the field of sociological studies on school choice, discusses the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu's theories to understand high school choice, in a small town in the Brazilian semi-arid region, in the state of Minas Gerais. More specifically, it argues the relevance and usefulness of the concept of cultural capital in this context. It is based on the results of a study about the choosing process, by young people and their families, of Instituto Federal do Norte de Minas Gerais (IFNMG), more specifically, the Technical Course on Internet Technology, integrated into high school, which is offered at the Janaúba Campus of IFNMG. The methodological procedures were: questionnaires to students and their guardians; focus groups with students, and interviews with some of them and their guardians. The results point to the need to consider, in the researched context, the concept of cultural capital in a broader sense, not necessarily linked to high culture, but keeping the idea of cultural resources that represent advantages in the academic field. In this regard, the research reaffirms the usefulness and relevance of the concept of cultural capital and, especially, of the notion of informational capital, when understanding school choice processes.

Keywords: School choice. Integrated high school. Bourdieu. Cultural capital.

Introduction

Twenty years after his death, the debate around the work of Pierre Bourdieu – one of the most cited sociologists of the 20th century (WACQUANT, 2002), celebrated in various sectors of educational research – remains large, indicating issues that are still controversial (DAVIES; RIZK, 2018). Over the decades, new studies have been built based on criticisms of his work, such as those by Snyders (1976), Charlot (1996, 2000), and Lahire (1997; 2002), to name just a few. Contemporaneously, discussions around the Bourdieusian legacy – such as those carried out by Draelants & Ballatore (2014), Davies & Rizk (2018), and Nogueira (2021), among others – put on the agenda the relevance and explanatory contribution of his concepts to the current context.

The critical balances carried out by these authors discuss, among other issues, one of Bourdieu's first and main concepts: cultural capital. For Draelants and Ballatore (2014, p. 186), it is one of the "*concepts majeurs*" (main concepts) in the entire sociology of education. Davies & Rizk (2018, p. 331) characterize it as "*Pierre Bourdieu's signature concept*" – the "signature" or a kind of "trademark" of this important sociologist.

With this concept – developed from the 1960s onwards –, Bourdieu sought a way to explain the differences in school performance obtained by children from different

social classes, opposing the explanations coming from the theory of human capital and the belief in the existence of “aptitudes” (BOURDIEU, 1998a). Contrary to claims that inequalities in school performance would be due simply or solely to economic factors or to “gift”, he affirmed that these inequalities are the result of the, also unequal, distribution of cultural capital between classes and class fractions: “The school performance of the school action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family” (BOURDIEU, 1998b, p. 74, our translation). In allusion to the Marxist concept of (economic) capital, in Bourdieu, cultural capital is also inherited and holds the possibility of transforming itself into other kinds of capital or generating more capital. It is a “diverse cultural heritage”, within the scope of the socially dominant culture, “composed of mental structures (ways of thinking about the world), mastery of the standard language, general culture, body postures, aesthetic dispositions, varied cultural goods (books and other cultural materials), etc.” (NOGUEIRA, 2017, p. 103). Invested in the school market, this capital generates dividends or advantages, since the school basically operates with this socially legitimized culture, in its curricula and its evaluation systems (NOGUEIRA, 2017).

The purpose of the study carried out by Draelants & Ballatore (2014) was to assess the heuristic power and relevance of this concept for understanding the current processes of social reproduction through school education, more than 50 years since its first formulation. Through a review of sociological literature in French, the authors discuss the definition, use, and appropriation of the concept of cultural capital, as well as its school profitability in the present historical moment. Additionally, they discuss the growing relevance of other types of capital, such as economic and social – and their conversion into cultural capital –, for contemporary educational inequalities.

The survey carried out by Davies & Rizk (2018), on the other hand, aims to review the evolution of the uses of the concept of cultural capital in empirical research in education, focusing on English language studies, identifying and analyzing three generations of work. It aims, therefore, to evaluate the usefulness of the concept for researchers in education and to point out future directions for research.

One of the fields of contemporary research in the sociology of education in which Bourdieu’s theory and his concept of cultural capital have been heavily used is studies on the choice of educational establishments. Situated in this field, the present article intends to discuss the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s theorizations for the approach to this theme in a very peculiar context. More specifically, the text aims to analyze the usefulness of the concept of cultural capital, developed by the author in the second half of the 20th century, in France, to understand the current processes of high school choice in a small town in the countryside of Brazil.

In order to do that, we will discuss the results of research on the process of young people and their families choosing Instituto Federal do Norte de Minas Gerais (IFNMG) and, more specifically, the course Técnico em Informática para Internet (Computer

Technician for the Internet, our translation), integrated to high school, offered by the institute on the Janaúba *campus* – a small town located in the Brazilian semi-arid region of Minas Gerais, marked by high rates of poverty their previous school trajectory, and gather indicators about the school choice process, we prepared a questionnaire, that was answered by 97 of the 106 students enrolled in the classes of 2017, 2018, and 2019. Questionnaires were also sent to students' parents/guardians, totaling 142², of which 114 were answered. Furthermore, to deepen the understanding of the choosing process, focus groups were held with students from the classes of 2017 and 2019 who were willing to participate in this step of the research. Altogether, five groups were organized, with a total of 31 students, based on the criteria: year of admission to IFNMG and parents' education. Regarding the latter, three levels were considered: incomplete or complete elementary education; complete secondary education; and complete higher education³. Individual interviews. In the second section, we will present a brief synthesis of the sociological discussion on the school choice process, emphasizing the presence of Bourdieu's work as a reference for such discussion. In the third section, we will analyze some research results, seeking to interpret them in the light of the Bourdieusian theory; at first, taking more general aspects of the theory and then focusing on the discussion of cultural capital. In the fourth and last section, we will bring the final considerations.

Studies on school choice and their dialogue with the work of Pierre Bourdieu

Since the final decades of the 20th century, the complexification and differentiation of school networks – resulting in the expansion of the possibility of choice by users – as well as the growing concern of parents or guardians with the schooling process of their children made school choice gain centrality in the lives of many families (NOGUEIRA, 1998; 2005). Within the scope of a theoretical reorientation in the field of sociology of education – which shifted the attention from macrostructures to the microsocial level –, this choice became the object of research in many parts of the world.

The work by Pierre Bourdieu constitutes a fundamental reference for such studies. Although he addressed, in some of his works, the choice of an educational establishment

² The questionnaire for parents/guardians only contained items referring to the socioeconomic and cultural profile of the families of the IFNMG – Janaúba. Thus, it was also applied, in the second year of the field research, to the group entering 2020 – although this group was not participating in the research about choice, which included the groups from 2017 to 2019 –, to better understand trends related to this profile.

³ For each level of education, two focus groups were carried out (classes of 2017 and 2019), with the exception of the group of parents with elementary education (group only of the class of 2017), because there were no freshmen in 2019, willing to participate in the study, who had families with this level of schooling.

as part of the social reproduction strategies of wealthier families (BOURDIEU; SAINT MARTIN, 1978; BOURDIEU, 1989; 1996), Bourdieu did not take this choice as an object of specific analysis. However, his theories about the role of different capitals (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) in the reproduction of school and social inequalities – with emphasis on cultural capital – have been fundamental for studies on the choice of an educational establishment, from the “pioneer” works to the most recent ones. According to these studies, the greater the cultural capital, the greater the predisposition of the family to make a careful, informed, and strategic school choice for their children (NOGUEIRA, 1998) – highlighting, then, the role of what became known as informational capital of the family, which would be one of the components of cultural capital.

In the text “The School as a Conservative Force”, originally published in 1966, Bourdieu already states that one of the most profitable parts of cultural capital in school life is constituted by the “informational capital” about the school world and the possible trajectories within it (BOURDIEU, 1998a, p. 45). According to the sociologist, many families, despite having more prestigious schools (such as *lycées*, in the case of French secondary education) in the surroundings of their home, do not know them and enroll their children in less reputable establishments. He states that “The *lycée* is not part of the concrete universe of popular families” (BOURDIEU, 1998a, p. 45, our translation) and only the exceptional success of the children, combined with advice from the teacher or other family members, would make these families consider sending them there. Years later, in the chapter “The new capital”, published in the book *Practical Reason* (original from 1994), addressing the issue of the mode of reproduction mediated by the school – densely discussed in *The State Nobility* (BOURDIEU, 1989) –, the author states the benefits of informational capital in the school trajectory:

[...] those who have the benefit, through family, [...] or their acquaintances, of information about the formation circuits and their actual or potential differential profit can make better educational investments and earn maximum returns on their cultural capital. This is one of the mediations through which scholastic - and social - success are linked to social origin (BOURDIEU, 1996, p. 42, our translation).

In studies on the choice of educational establishments, these theories by Bourdieu have been confirmed. The research by Ball, Gewirtz, & Bowe (1994, 1995), carried out in London in the light of the Bourdieusian theory, is an example of this. The authors show how different social groups are guided in relation to the school choice for their children and how this choice varies according to the social environment of origin. For a group of socio-economically and culturally more favored parents – the “privileged/skilled choosers” – school choice is central to their lives and is based on the adjustment between the characteristics of institutions and those of their children. These families have a set of information about the education system (knowledge about educational

policies, pedagogical practice, teaching staff, differences between schools) and they analyze the academic results produced by the school establishments, environment, and clientele based on it. The authors also draw attention to the family's network, that is, social capital, as called by Bourdieu (1998d), which directly influences this decision-making process. As for the "semi-skilled choosers", despite their inclination to choose, the lack of sufficient knowledge about education systems prevents them from making it on their own. Thus, to do so, they rely on the opinion of third parties and on the reputation of schools. And for the last group, with a lower level of education – the "disconnected choosers" – school choice is not central to their lives. In a context marked by pressing economic and social needs and the lack of knowledge about the education system, this decision is based on objective criteria such as the distance from home and safety, for example.

In France, research by, among others, Héran (1996) and Ballion (1982), as well as English studies, point out the crucial role of cultural capital in school choice, especially the capital of information about the school system. According to the results of a study carried out by Héran (1996), having information about the education system allows families to make a more "active" choice, often refusing the public establishment designated by the French sectorization law.

Ballion (1982) – although aligned with the methodological individualism current, moving away from the Bourdieusian perspective when analyzing the school choice as a planned and conscious action, the result of a rational calculation based on the analysis of costs and benefits – converges with the others regarding the importance of the sociocultural condition of families in the choice process. The author also draws attention to the role of parent-teachers in choosing a school, considering their knowledge about the education system.

In more contemporary works, the role of family capital also stands out in the analysis of school choice, confirming the relevance of Bourdieu's formulations. The studies by Van Zanten (2009), for instance, while highlighting aspects such as school segregation processes and the "location effect" of the place where the school is located and where the families live, also take economic, cultural, and social capital as fundamental elements in the analyses. In research carried out by Oliveira (2005) – with families from an intellectualized economic elite – and by Pinto (2009) – with "upper" fractions of the middle classes –, the authors identified that the school choice was carried out considering the knowledge that parents had about the school market, focusing on the private system in both investigations. Family capital allowed, in this case, to guide, for example, the choices of the school pedagogical proposal (OLIVEIRA, 2005), the adequacy of the curriculum to the children's characteristics, as well as the teaching of values and principles prioritized by the parents (PINTO, 2009). Other more recent research has also found that, even among less favored sectors of the population, active processes of choosing the educational establishment are carried out, but the ability to choose varies

between groups, according to different capitals, especially the informational capital of families. More recent studies have also found that, even among less favored sectors of the population, active processes of choosing the educational establishment are carried out, but the ability to choose varies between groups, according to different forms of capital, especially the informational capital of families (ALVES, 2010; NOGUEIRA; RESENDE; VIANA, 2015).

In summary, according to the literature in the field, the choice of educational establishment has a social character and, therefore, depends on several objective and subjective variables (RESENDE; NOGUEIRA; NOGUEIRA; 2011). Among them, it is possible to highlight: the possibilities of choice for each social group, considering the structure of “available” educational opportunities and the direct and indirect costs (tuition, transport, time invested, etc.); the criteria taken into account by different families (distance from school, pedagogical proposal/quality of teaching, school clientele, etc.); the importance given to schooling, associated with the students’ and parents’ expectations; and the form and volume of family capital.

Considering all these issues, we set out to analyze how this choice is processed in the lives of young students who entered a federal high school, located in the countryside of Minas Gerais, in the city of Janaúba.

The choice of Instituto Federal do Norte de Minas Gerais by young people and their families: a discussion from the Bourdieusian perspective

An attractive choice especially for the middle strata of the population

IFNMG is a federal public institution of higher, basic, and professional education, which currently has 11 campuses, including Janaúba. In this city, it makes up the structure of educational opportunities for high school with nine more state public schools and three private schools.

In 2018 and 2019, the institute ranked first in *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio* (ENEM) among public schools in the city and second among all high schools in the city. Thus – like the other Brazilian federal education institutes, in general –, it is a public school socially reputed as an institution of excellence.

In addition to the results in evaluation processes, this reputation also comes from different conditions compared to other public schools, such as a high level of qualifications of teachers (at the IFNMG, 86% are masters or doctors, according to the institute’s internal surveys), differentiated teaching careers, good infrastructure, and adequate teaching resources (such as laboratories, equipment). Another crucial factor in understanding the outstanding performance of federal institutes is the way in which students are recruited. Unlike what happens in state and municipal schools, candidates for admission to most Federal Institutes of Education need to pass a selection exam.

In the case of IFNMG, admission to high school integrated with the technical course depends on passing an objective test, with Portuguese, mathematics, humanities, and natural sciences questions. In this sense, students with better performance stand out, which intensifies social selection and legitimizes the school hierarchy, as stated by Bourdieu & Passeron (2008). This type of selection privileges the most socially favored (MENDES, 2015) and those with a good education in elementary school (OLIVEIRA, 2010), so that part of the school's performance needs to be attributed not (only) to an effect of the establishment itself, but to the "school and social quality of its public" (DUBET, 2004, p. 50). As discussed by Arco Netto (2011), regarding the Escola Técnica Federal de São Paulo, a highly selected public at admission is more susceptible to the pedagogical action of the institution, which is already, initially, differentiated from other public schools.

However, it is not possible to say that this institution does not also enroll disadvantaged students from a socioeconomic point of view once, since 2012, the quota policy established by Law No. 12.711/2012 has been in force (BRASIL, 2012). In accordance with this law, 50% of the vacancies in the IFNMG selection process are intended for students who have fully attended elementary school in the public system, with this percentage also reserved for those with lower purchasing power, in addition to black and indigenous people.

The distinctive aspects of federal institutes attract the attention of different segments of the population, who come to them to seek access to better quality schooling, not aiming at an education of terminal character and admission into the job market, but at a better preparation for admission into public universities.

The results of the questionnaires answered by the IFNMG students, in a total of 97, point out exactly in that direction. The great motivation indicated by young people for choosing this school is related to higher education. When asked about the degree of importance of the factors that led them to choose the federal institute, the most recurrently indicated as decisive or important for this choice were: the good reputation of the school/quality of education (marked by 95 of the respondents) and the good chance of passing the entrance exam/ENEM (94). The option "entering a public university through quotas" was considered decisive or important by 75 of the 97 respondents. When asked if they would take the technical course they were enrolled in if it were not linked to high school, only 28 answered "yes". Regarding plans for the future, most students (93) answered that, upon completing high school, they intended to pursue a higher education course. Based on these answers, it is possible to affirm that the "teaching quality", which would allow the continuity of schooling, is the main indicator to be taken into account in the subjects' discourse when they are asked to justify their choice.

Furthermore, the research also showed that, as the IFNMG became better known in the city, competition for vacancies increased (in the case of the CTII course, from

5.95 candidates per vacancy in 2016 to 9.82 in 2019), with a consequent increase in the minimum grade for approval in the selection process (open competition: from 19 in 2016 to 23 in 2019; in the reservation of vacancies/quotas: from 18 in 2016 to 26 in 2019).

These data indicate that, in the dispute for access to higher education in the city of Janaúba, a vacancy in the institute – considering the unique combination of differential quality, gratuity, and also the possibility of access to public higher education through quotas – constitutes a “rare good”, an object of fiercer competition than vacancies in other public schools. However, this does not mean that the aspiration for this vacancy is equally distributed among all social groups in the city. In Bourdieusian terms, it can be said that both the existence of aspiration and the strategies to obtain the desired vacancy are tributary to the structure of family capital.

In this sense, it is worth analyzing the social and economic profile of IFNMG students. The data obtained through the questionnaires showed that most students are brown or black, started high school at a regular age (14 or 15 years old), have a linear school trajectory, parents with at least completed high school, and a family income of up to three minimum wages. Moreover, they are mostly from the public school system, “full-time students” (ROMANELLI, 2003, our translation), coming from nuclear families, whose parents have qualified occupations, and who have access to a varied set of benefits, such as home ownership, computer/notebook, internet, motor vehicles, among others.

Considering the socioeconomic context of Janaúba – a city that, as mentioned, is located in the Brazilian semi-arid region, marked by high poverty rates –, it is possible to affirm that this profile of the IFNMG student body places it among the middle strata of the city’s population. In a region characterized by low income, the families that use the institute, although they are not part of the elites, have some relative advantages, compared to most of the population, especially in the field of schooling⁴.

This median profile in social terms also finds an explanation in Pierre Bourdieu’s theory. According to the author, the relationship one has with schooling is linked, as well as the entire sphere of practices, to the social group to which one belongs. Or, in other words, the relationship with the school may, according to Bourdieu, be understood, in a general way, based on the social origin of students and their families. There are exceptions, but, for the French sociologist, they contribute to confirm the rule. And it is the middle classes and their fractions that, according to the Bourdieusian theory, would invest more in school education since the possibility of social ascension for these

⁴ Among the 114 families that responded to the survey questionnaires, approximately 40% of mothers and 25% of fathers have complete higher education and 44% of mothers and 29% of fathers have complete secondary education. In 2010, according to Atlas de Desenvolvimento Social, the rates for the respective levels of education in the population of Janaúba were only 8.3% for higher education and 20.4% for secondary education.

groups would be almost exclusively in school (NOGUEIRA, 1991). On the other hand, the popular strata and the elites would tend to invest more moderately in schooling. For the first group, schooling would represent a very costly investment with uncertain returns, given their material conditions. The elites, however, would not depend on the school to maintain their social position⁵.

In this sense, the fact that the IFNMG student body is composed mostly of middle strata, considering the entire population of the municipality of Janaúba, finds a very clear explanation in Bourdieu's work. As this is an institution considered to be of differential quality, it attracts families whose possibility of social mobility is largely provided by the school.

The explanation for the low presence of students from lower strata of the popular classes at the institute is also related to this. According to Bourdieu (1998a, p. 47), the aspirations and demands of disadvantaged groups tend to be limited by objective conditions "that exclude the possibility of desiring the impossible", making them consider, concerning schools and most prestigious courses: "this is not for us". This would be an "expression of an internalized need" that would express "both an impossibility and an interdiction" (BOURDIEU, 1998a, our translation), indicating the existence of what the author calls a "causality of the probable", that is, a causal relationship between the objectively existing chances of access to this type of educational opportunity and subjective expectations in relation to it.

This means that, for families from the lower strata of the popular classes in Janaúba, higher education and the federal institute itself probably do not constitute an aspiration. Young people from these strata who attend high school at the IFNMG configure, in Bourdieu's terms (1998a), cases of "superselection", in which many obstacles had to be overcome, in an unevenly severe selection along the trajectories. An example is Maria⁶, a student in the class of 2017, self-declared black, coming from a single-parent female family, whose mother, without a steady job, sometimes worked as a housecleaner and sometimes as a rural worker to support her four children. The family has always faced many economic difficulties, including food deprivation. The choice for the IFNMG –

⁵ Evidently, this generalized way of presenting the relationship between social groups and schooling does not do justice to the many degrees that exist between the forms described by Bourdieu and that seem to us to refer to poles of a continuum, which needs to be nuanced. In this sense, it is important to remember the works on schooling in popular environments and on schooling in the elites that focus precisely on these nuances of the continuum.

⁶ All the names of the subjects in this work are fictitious, considering the need to protect their anonymity, according to the Free and Informed Consent Form signed by them. It is also worth mentioning that this article is derived from research approved by the Ethics Committee of the Federal University of Minas Gerais and, therefore, meets the ethical precepts of scientific research as provided for in Resolutions No. 510/2016 and 466/2012 of the National Council of Health, which regulate research with human beings in Brazil.

an institution unknown to the family until then – was influenced by a friend of Maria, who participated with her in a social project and told her about this school. A student of outstanding performance in elementary school, Maria managed to pass the selection process for the institute. However, unlike most of the newcomers to the institution, who, as we have seen, wanted to continue their studies by passing higher education entrance exams, she did not have this type of expectation. Her objective living conditions did not allow her to dream of entering higher education. The need for subsistence imposed on her the demand for work from childhood (as a babysitter and street vendor) and work was on her horizon of possibilities. In Maria's own words: "We did not see many opportunities for us before [...] with low incomes, like this, we just have to work, and get a good job [...], actually, any formal job is already good" (our translation).

Maria's testimony illustrates the propositions by Bourdieu (1998c), according to which the plans formulated for the future by people are the result of the internalization of the possible chances of achieving a certain objective for the average of the social category to which they belong. However, for the sociologist, aspirations are also regulated through an "empirical estimate", that is, based on data from the experienced reality. In this direction, certain external events may modify an individual's internal perception of their chances of obtaining a certain good or position, performing what the author calls "mediation by an interposed situation" (BOURDIEU, 1998c). In the case of Maria, it seems to us that the fact of studying at the IFNMG made this mediation possible, making her aspire to something improbable for her social group (and carry it out, albeit with limitations and difficulties). This is because, after finishing high school, Maria enrolled in a degree in Psychology at a private college in Janaúba. Although it is not a prestigious segment of higher education – especially considering that the student enrolled at the night shift, due to the need to study and work – it still represents an important process of mobility, given the young woman's social origin. And, above all, it leads us to think that hundreds of young people from the same city, from a socioeconomic background similar to hers, could not even build their aspirations for higher education.

A choice mediated by cultural capital

Families of popular origin, such as Maria's, generally tend not to formulate aspirations regarding higher education and the federal institute because, as we stated earlier, they often do not have enough information about these educational opportunities. In Bourdieusian terms – and confirming other studies on school choice already mentioned here –, the option for the IFNMG has close relations with cultural capital and, in it, with the informational capital of the students' families.

Since the beginning of his work, Bourdieu devoted himself to the discussion about the different weight of economic and cultural factors in the educational destiny of

individuals. In a text originally published in 1966, the author affirms the central role of the unequal distribution of cultural capital between social classes and class fractions in school performance. Discussing the data obtained by French demography at the time, he states: “[...] with an equal degree, income does not have any influence of its own on school success and [...], on the contrary, with equal income, the proportion of good students varies significantly depending on whether the parent is not a graduate” (BOURDIEU, 1998a, p. 42, our translation).

Similarly, the socioeconomic characterization carried out in this study showed that, in comparison with the income of the general population of the city of Janaúba, the income of the families of IFNMG students does not differ greatly. However, with regard to parents’ education, something quite different occurs, as the families of IFNMG students had much higher levels of education than other local public schools and the majority of the population of Janaúba. These data point to the specificity of the public that demands this high school education integrated into the technical course and to the current relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to understand the choice of an educational establishment.

Here, it is worth a brief discussion about what is considered cultural capital in the Janaúba scenario. In their critical assessment, Draelants & Ballatore (2014) address different definitions and uses of the concept of cultural capital, grouping them into two types: narrow definition and broad definition. The first group restricts the notion of cultural capital to cultural works considered legitimate. The second type, on the other hand, expands the content of the concept by considering the dispositions of individuals and their relationships with cultural goods. The authors state that those who use the narrow definition of cultural capital tend to question its role in explaining current school inequalities. On the other hand, this questioning would lose its force when we make use of the broad definition of the concept of cultural capital. This is because, according to the authors, cultural capital must be understood as a process and not as an attribute of the subjects. They defend that it is necessary to pay attention to the relational dimension that Bourdieu always attributed to his sociology – as is also argued, for instance, by Grenfell (2018).

According to Draelants & Ballatore (2014), currently, the way in which each one relates to a particular cultural object would be more important than the object itself. In this sense, the authors claim that, although the most profitable cultural contents in contemporary schools may have changed, the fact that there is something more profitable at school and that benefits (more) some (than others) has not changed.

In the analysis carried out by Davies and Rizk (2018), there are arguments in a similar direction. According to them, when forging the concept of cultural capital, Bourdieu referred to the elements of traditional European high culture, as it is valued and rewarded in French schools. However, this does not mean that speaking of cultural capital in Bourdieusian terms implies taking these same parameters, regardless of the

context. Bourdieu himself voiced this concern, “contending that cultural capital is a relational concept, not a substantive one” (DAVIES; RIZK, 2018, p. 347), making it necessary to survey which cultural goods are socially valued in every medium in which one desires to use it.

According to Davies and Rizk (2018), some authors point out that school success does not necessarily depend on access to high culture, as schools reward more commonplace habits such as disciplined work and, especially, reading. Thus, maintaining the emphasis on cultural resources that generate school advantages, which is at the base of the idea of cultural capital, the possibilities of resources to be considered are expanded.

These broader and more flexible interpretations of the concept of cultural capital seem to us to be more appropriate to the Brazilian context in general and, especially, to cities such as Janaúba. In this sense, indicating a “greater cultural capital” of the families of IFNMG students, compared to the population of Janaúba, does not mean that it is a group with strong access to socially legitimized culture, much less to a “high culture”. As for the students investigated in this research, in most cases, the number of books at home is low (almost 60% have between 1 and 20 books at home); approximately 63% say they have never taken an English course outside of school; 45% of students know at most two Brazilian states; and only three students (less than 4%) have already been to other countries. Speaking of “greater cultural capital”, in terms relative to the city reality, means, therefore, referring to advantages such as a higher level of schooling in the family group, access to a capital of information about the education system, as well as some habits that, associated with more educated families, may be profitable at school, such as the habit of reading. In the questionnaire answered by the students, 94% of them claimed to have the habit of reading other books in addition to those prescribed by the school.

Understood in this way, we emphasize again that the research confirmed the centrality of cultural capital in the construction of school choice and, above all, the most profitable choice. Such centrality is clear when comparing the selection process in the groups of students arranged according to their parents’ education.

The group whose families have low schooling (fathers and mothers with complete or incomplete elementary education, including one illiterate parent) was formed by seven students from the class of 2017. In it, only two families knew the IFNMG before the time of selection; the others had no previous information about the institution. The children become aware of it, a little before the selection process, through acquaintances and teachers from the elementary school they attended. In this sense, they are led to take the leading role of the choice. However, expectations regarding the institute are not clear and this choice may have limited scope, as we saw in the case of Maria: a choice made by herself, without family support, which was only possible due to a series of random events, especially the recommendation of the school by a friend, which allowed her to get to know the IFNMG. Here, we see the image of the “ship adrift”

– used by Viana (2003, our translation) to describe trajectories of school longevity in popular circles –, considering that, due to the very low volume of informational capital in the family, the choice was not the result of a deliberate project, but a gradual and “artisanal” (TETZLAFF, 2017) construction, carried out based on the opportunities that arose along the way.

In the group of students whose families have average schooling (comprising 12 students, 6 from the class of 2017 and 6 from the class of 2019, whose most fathers and mothers have completed high school), almost all families already knew IFNMG before the selection process (up to one year before the selection process). We identified, in this group, families “mobilized” in favor of the schooling process of their children and inclined to choose the “good” school. Carla – a student of the class of 2017, self-declared white, coming from a nuclear family, whose parents work (her mother is a self-employed decorator and business consultant; her father is a public servant electrician) –, for instance, reported that, when she learned about the selection process for admission to the IFNMG through friends who were studying at the institution, she registered and commented to her parents, who immediately sought information about the school, visited it, and encouraged the enrollment of the young woman after her approval in the selection process.

Regarding the group of students in which at least one of the parents has completed higher education (made up of 12 young people, 5 from the class of 2017 and 7 from the class of 2019, with parents who perform “qualified” occupations, developing higher-level activities, such as teacher, business administrator, among others), the volume of informational capital – as would be expected, based on Bourdieu’s theory – is much higher. An example of this is that there are situations of parents who already knew the IFNMG and even “introduced” it to their children, unlike what happened in the other groups. In this scenario, the decisive role of families in the school choice process stands out, influenced by their sociability network - friends and relatives whose children studied at the IFNMG or had already undergone the selection process. It is, in Bourdieusian terms, the social capital of families – also considered in a relative way, given the reality of the municipality of Janaúba – being reconverted into cultural capital. In this group, the participation of parents in school choice is not limited to the support given to their children. The role played by some of them is direct and decisive, even imposing, in cases where the children are opposed to the school indication. And even in cases – less numerous – in which the choice was made by the students, influenced by elementary school teachers and friends, the “presence” of parents is also observed, in the form of a *background* of information and dispositions on which these young people rely to make their choice.

In this last group, the selection process differs from the others due to its more “strategic” character, especially on the part of students and families who come from the private education system. For these families, studying at the IFNMG means having, at

no cost, a course of quality equivalent to what they could obtain in private education, and which also provides access to higher education through the quota system aimed at students from public schools. In the case of Dayse – a student in the class of 2017, who had always studied in private schools before going to the IFNMG, self-declared white, coming from a nuclear family, whose mother is a public servant teacher and the father is a merchant –, for instance, the school choice was made by her mother, considering the quality of education and the possibility of her daughter entering higher education through quotas. The student stated, in the individual interview, that her mother “gave it a lot of thought”, taking into account the fact that her daughter is white and comes from private schools. According to Dayse, narrating the mother’s conclusion: “[...] if I went to a public school, I would have it a little easier. [...] when I went to college I would be able to use this type of quota too”. It is worth highlighting that the choice was preceded by an assessment of the institution’s ability to prepare for the university entrance exam, “measured” by its performance in ENEM. And the choice was also made by assessing the daughter’s performance, which, in the mother’s calculation, was not good enough to dispense with the quotas, as Dayse explains: “And because of my grades, which were not so wonderful. Even though they were good, they were not those notes that could make me pass easily”. It is possible to see that this is a family that, having high informational capital on the education system, manages to “play” by its rules, which may also be attributed to the mother’s occupational insertion, who is a teacher. As pointed out by Nogueira (2013), teacher parents are a kind of “professional parents”, as they have “advantages” arising from the profession, capable of making the educational path of their children more profitable, especially considering the knowledge they have about the educational system.

Final considerations

After more than 50 years since the initial formulations of Bourdieu’s theory in the French context, many people question whether, given the economic, social, and cultural changes that have taken place since then, the relevance of his contributions remains. Is it still possible to say that the cultural dimension of social position is central to school performance? Does the concept of cultural capital retain its topicality and relevance today? In what manner?

This text dealt with a specific application of the concept of cultural capital and Bourdieu’s theories in general: the understanding of the school choice process. Considering the procedural and, above all, the relational dimension of the concept of cultural capital, we discussed how it can contribute to understanding the conditions in which the process of choosing a high school integrated into the technical course in the interior of Minas Gerais takes place – and the meanings it takes to different family groups. We showed that IFNMG students and their families have very high levels of

education in relation to the local population, a fact that did not occur with regard to family income. That is, we can infer that, in order to study at this school, it is necessary to have parents with a level of education higher than the population of Janaúba has in general (which does not necessarily mean holding a higher education degree). Or, in Bourdieusian terms, it is necessary to have cultural capital, considered in a relational way in the specific context.

Furthermore, this study also showed that, in the process of choosing the IFNMG, family information capital played an important role. Although young people from popular backgrounds with little or none of this capital are also studying at this school, for those cases where there was high informational capital, the choice was more strategic. Based on the results of the investigation presented here, it would be possible to state that students from lower strata of popular classes who attend the IFNMG arrived there relatively randomly, while for young people from the middle classes the choice was intentional and quite guided. Although beyond the scope of the study, it can be assumed that these different processes of choice also have different implications for school trajectories.

These results also indicate that, although we are not referring to a “high culture” when we mention the cultural capital of some families of IFNMG students, it is clear that certain information and knowledge benefited some more than others in the process of choosing this school. This goes in the direction of adopting a broader definition of the concept of cultural capital, which, according to Draelants and Ballatore (2014), is more suitable for using Bourdieu’s work in the current context.

In this sense, the research results indicated that the concept of cultural capital is valid to understand the process of choosing an educational establishment, even when it is so historically, socially, and culturally distant from the context in which the author formulated this concept. Also, they indicate that Bourdieu’s theories continue to offer relevant conceptual tools for the understanding of educational realities - although, of course, his postulates need to be considered based on each specific reality, as defended by the author himself.

REFERENCES

ALVES, Fátima. Escolhas Familiares, Estratificação Educacional e Desempenho Escolar: Quais as Relações? *Revista de Ciências Sociais*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 53, n. 2, p. 447- 468, 2010. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/dados/a/nhhCKqXgjWtHnTL4Xyjn6Fw/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2018.

ARCO NETTO, Nicolau Dela Bandeira. Os nerds e o prodígio: a produção do sucesso escolar na Escola Técnica Federal de São Paulo. *Anais da 34ª Reunião Anual da ANPED*. Natal: ANPED, 2011.

BALL, Stephen; GEWIRTZ, Sharon; BOWE, Richard. *School choice, social class and distinction: the realisation of social advantage in education*. Londres: Centre for Educational Studies. King's College. Relatório de pesquisa, 1994. Mimeografado.

BALL, Stephen; GEWIRTZ, Sharon; BOWE, Richard. *Markets, choice and equity in education*. Buckingham/Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1995.

BALLION, Robert. *Less consommateurs d'école*. Paris: Ed. Stock, 1982.

BOURDIEU, Pierre; SAINT-MARTIN, Monique. Le patronat. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, v. 20-21, 1978, p. 3-82. Disponível em: https://www.persee.fr/doc/arss_0335-5322_1978_num_20_1_2592. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2022.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. *La noblesse d'État: grandes écoles et esprit de corps*. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1989.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. O novo capital. In: BOURDIEU, Pierre. *Razões práticas: sobre a teoria da ação*. Campinas: Ed. Papirus, 1996. p. 35-52.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. A escola conservadora: as desigualdades frente à escola e à cultura. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; CATANI, Afrânio. *Escritos de educação*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998a. p. 39-64.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. Os três estados do capital cultural. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; CATANI, Afrânio. *Escritos de educação*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998b. p. 71-79.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. Futuro de classe e causalidade do provável. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; CATANI, Afrânio. *Escritos de educação*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998c. p. 81-126.

BOURDIEU, Pierre. O capital social – notas provisórias. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; CATANI, Afrânio. *Escritos de educação*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1998d. p. 65-69.

BOURDIEU, Pierre; PASSERON, Jean-Claude. *A reprodução*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2008.

BRASIL. Presidência da República. *Lei nº 12.711, de 29 de agosto de 2012*. Dispõe sobre o ingresso nas universidades federais e nas instituições federais de ensino técnico de nível médio e dá outras providências. Brasília, DF: Presidência da República, 2012. Disponível em: http://www.planalto.gov.br/ccivil_03/_ato2011-2014/2012/lei/12711.htm. Acesso em: 15 fev. 2017.

CHARLOT, Bernard. Relação com o saber e com a escola entre estudantes de periferia. *Cadernos de Pesquisa*, São Paulo, n. 97, p. 47-63, 1996.

CHARLOT, Bernard. *Da relação com o saber: elementos para uma teoria*. Porto Alegre: Artmed, 2000.

DAVIES, Scott; RIZK, Jessica. The three generations of cultural capital research: A narrative review. *Review of Educational Research*, Toronto. v. 88, n. 3, p. 331-365, 2018. Disponível em: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0034654317748423>. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2018.

DRAELANTS, Huges; BALLATORE, Magali. Capital culturel et reproduction scolaire. Un bilan critique. *Revue française de pédagogie*, n. 186, p. 115-142, 2014. Disponível em: <http://>

journals.openedition.org/rfp/4430. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2018.

DUBET, François. Onde estariam as promessas de mudanças no sistema escolar? *Presença Pedagógica*, Belo Horizonte, v. 10, n. 59, p. 49-52, 2004.

HÉRAN, François. École publique, école privée: qui peut choisir? *Économie et Statistique*, n. 293, v. 3, p. 5-9, 1996. Disponível em: https://www.persee.fr/doc/AsPDF/estat_0336-1454_1996_num_293_1_6046.pdf. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2018.

GRENFELL, Michael. Introdução. In: GRENFELL, Michael. *Pierre Bourdieu: conceitos fundamentais*. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2018. p. 15-21.

LAHIRE, Bernard. *Sucesso escolar nos meios populares: as razões do improvável*. São Paulo: Editora Ática, 1997.

LAHIRE, Bernard. Reprodução ou prolongamentos críticos? *Educação & Sociedade*, Campinas, v. 23, n. 78, p. 37-55, 2002. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/es/a/xfdfCzYBZjGnwck88KKc6Gq/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Acesso em: 02 jan. 2018.

MENDES, Izabel Alves Macedo. *O perfil do aluno do IFNMG Campus Januária em perspectiva sociológica*. 2015. 145 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Sociologia Política) – Programa de Pós Graduação, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Santa Catarina, 2015. Disponível em: <https://repositorio.ufsc.br/xmlui/handle/123456789/160654>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice. Trajetórias escolares, estratégias culturais e classes sociais. Notas em vista da construção de um objeto de pesquisa. *Teoria & Educação*, Porto Alegre, v. 3, n. 3, p. 89- 112, 1991.

NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice. A escolha do estabelecimento de ensino pelas famílias – A ação discreta da riqueza cultural. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, Rio de Janeiro, v. 1, n. 7, p. 42-56, 1998. Disponível em: <http://educa.fcc.org.br/pdf/rbedu/n07/n07a04.pdf>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice. A relação família-escola na contemporaneidade: fenômeno social/interrogações sociológicas. *Análise Social*, Portugal, v. 40, n. 176, p. 563-578, 2005. Disponível em: <http://analisesocial.ics.ul.pt/documentos/1218710803Y0rTC2qf4Zv28UH0.pdf>. Acesso em: 08 fev. 2021.

NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice. O capital cultural e a produção das desigualdades escolares contemporâneas. *Cadernos De Pesquisa*, São Paulo, v. 51, p. 1-13, 2021. Disponível em: <http://publicacoes.fcc.org.br/index.php/cp/article/view/7468>. Acesso em: 10 fev. 2022.

NOGUEIRA, Marlice de Oliveira. Efeito pai professor: o impacto da profissão docente na vida escolar dos filhos. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, v. 18, n. 52, p. 65-79, mar. 2013. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbedu/a/nzQxczMG6zWkLjPTkxzfsfx/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Acesso em: 13 maio 2020.

NOGUEIRA, Marlice de Oliveira. Quando os professores escolarizam os filhos na rede pública de ensino: da inevitabilidade à colonização. *Educação em Revista*, Belo Horizonte, n. 33, p. 1-26, 2017. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/edur/a/SwkbHMF9Pj7vMgc6v67Jzqgb/?for>

mat=pdf&lang=pt. Acesso em: 08 fev. 2021.

NOGUEIRA, Cláudio Marques Martins; RESENDE, Tânia de Freitas; VIANA, Maria José Braga. Escolha do estabelecimento de ensino, mobilização familiar e desempenho escolar. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, v. 20, n. 62, p. 749-772, set. 2015. Disponível em: <https://www.scielo.br/j/rbedu/a/6Mjc3v7xvpmLTHLgGmDfz5p/?format=pdf&lang=pt>. Acesso em: 30 jul. 2017.

OLIVEIRA, Cristiane Gomes de. “*Diga-me com quem anda e eu te direi quem és*”: a escolha da escola como estratégia de distinção. 2005. 148 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Pontifícia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro, 2005. Disponível em: <https://www.maxwell.vrac.puc-rio.br/colecao.php?strSecao=resultado&nrSeq=6069@1>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

OLIVEIRA, Nilza Helena de. *Instituições Federais de Educação Tecnológica: estabelecimentos escolares de referência no Ensino Médio brasileiro – o caso do Centro Federal de Educação Tecnológica de Minas Gerais*. 2010. 390 f. Tese (Doutorado em Educação) – Programa de Pós-Graduação em Educação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte, 2010. Disponível em: <http://hdl.handle.net/1843/FAEC-842P5D>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

PINTO, Juliana da Silva. *A escolha de escolas Waldorf por famílias das camadas médias*. 2009. 126 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Programa de Pós-Graduação, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Belo Horizonte, 2009. Disponível em: <http://hdl.handle.net/1843/FAEC-83UK69>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

RESENDE, Tânia de Freitas; NOGUEIRA, Cláudio Marques Martins; NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice. Escolha do estabelecimento de ensino e perfis familiares: uma faceta a mais das desigualdades escolares. *Educ. Soc.*, Campinas, v. 32, n. 117, p. 953-970, 2011. Disponível em: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=87321425003>. Acesso 02. jul. 2022.

ROMANELLI, Geraldo. Famílias de camadas médias e escolarização superior dos filhos: o estudante-trabalhador. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; ROMANELLI, Geraldo; ZAGO, Nadir. *Família & Escola: trajetórias de escolarização em camadas médias e populares*. 2. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2003. p. 99-123.

SNYDERS, Georges. *École, classe et lutte des classes*. Paris: PUF, 1976.

TETZLAFF, Iris Maria Bosco. *Escolhas ou escolhidos? Estudantes das camadas populares em uma escola de Ensino Médio técnico federal*. 2017. 125 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Educação) – Faculdade de Filosofia, Ciências e Letras de Ribeirão Preto, Universidade de São Paulo, Ribeirão Preto, 2017. Disponível em: <https://www.teses.usp.br/teses/disponiveis/59/59140/tde-19122017-084222/pt-br.php>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

VAN ZANTEN, Agnés. *Choisir son école: stratégies familiales et médiations locales*. Paris: PUF, 2009.

VIANA, Maria José Braga. Longevidade escolar em famílias de camadas populares: algumas condições de possibilidade. In: NOGUEIRA, Maria Alice; ROMANELLI, Geraldo; ZAGO, Nadir. *Família & Escola: trajetórias de escolarização em camadas médias e populares*. 2. ed. Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 2003. p. 45-60.

QUEIRÓS, B. T. M.; RESENDE, T. F. The choice of a federal integrated high school in...

WACQUANT, Loïc. O legado sociológico de Pierre Bourdieu: duas dimensões e uma nota pessoal. *Revista de Sociologia e Política*, Curitiba, n. 19, p. 95-110, 2002. Disponível em: <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-44782002000200007>. Acesso em: 02 jul. 2022.

Text received on 05/14/2022

Text approved on 08/28/2022