


THE FORMATION OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHER: A LOOK AT THE INITIAL GRADES

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/sevened2025.019-008>

Maria Ivani Chaves dos Santos¹

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary educational scenario, Religious Education in the Early Years of Elementary School emerges as an essential component for the integral formation of students. This article aims to promote a reflection on the training of the Religious Education teacher in the early years of elementary school, since the school plays a crucial role in critically exploring the religious dimensions, promoting a reflective and contextualized understanding. The approach to themes such as the function and values of religious traditions and the relationship between multiple religious cultures enriches learning and ethical formation. The motivation for choosing this theme is driven by the pressing need to rethink the practices of Religious Education in the Early Years, based on the premises of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) and in the light of the perspective of continuing education and teaching knowledge of Tardif (2000 and 2014) and Gauthier (1998). Thus, it was sought to analyze the training of teachers of the initial grades of Elementary School to teach the curricular component of Religious Education. The study is based on bibliographic and documentary research in this area of knowledge, aiming to understand the course of educators' training from graduation to the continuing education programs offered by the municipal education network. This study aims to broaden the debate on the importance of a consistent teacher training, since the legislation establishes that the integration of this knowledge to School Knowledge, as an object of study of the Curricular Component of Religious Education (CCER), occurs from the 1st year of the initial years of Elementary School. The results indicate that, although there are indications in the documents about the objects of knowledge of RE to be addressed in the initial grades, there is no prevalence of records about training for teachers, as occurs in the other curricular components.

Keywords: Training. Teacher. Religious Education. Early Series. BNCC.

¹Master's student in Religious Sciences
United College of VitóriaE-mail: ivani.chaves31@gmail.com
ORCID <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0464-521X>
Lattes: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/3894079947585767>

INTRODUCTION

The training of teachers for Religious Education (RE) in the early years of Elementary School faces several contemporary challenges. Although RE has been legally recognized as an integral part of the basic education of citizens since the Law of Guidelines and Bases (LDB) amended in 1997 – which ensures "respect for the religious cultural diversity of Brazil, prohibiting any form of proselytism" (BRASIL, 1997, Art. 33) – there are still gaps in the specific training of these teachers. The National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), approved in 2017, reinforces the non-confessional approach and the appreciation of religious plurality in the school space. RE is currently conceived as an area of knowledge whose "objective is to develop respect for cultural and religious diversity, prohibiting all forms of proselytism and religious indoctrination, as well as prejudice and discrimination" (BRASIL, 2017, p. 3). This normative direction requires teachers trained to deal with the religious phenomenon in a secular, dialogical and inclusive way – a demand that highlights the importance of a solid and coherent initial and continuing education.

However, the reality of teacher training in RE reveals historical and structural deficiencies. Research indicates that, in the Brazilian context, most of the attention given to the preparation of RE teachers has been focused on continuing education in service, with fewer studies and initiatives aimed at the initial university training of these professionals. As Junqueira and Fracaro point out, "research in the field of teacher training for Religious Education in the Brazilian scenario discusses continuing education with greater emphasis. The absence of a systematized reflection to verify the performance of the egress in the pedagogical practice is perceived" (JUNQUEIRA; FRACARO, 2013, p. 126). In other words, we lack consistent evaluations of how much the teaching degree courses actually prepare future teachers to teach RE in schools and how these graduates act in the classroom.

In the early years of Elementary School, this situation is particularly sensitive. In many school systems, the Religious Education classes of the first years are under the responsibility of multipurpose teachers trained in Pedagogy courses, who generally do not include in their curricular matrices a specific preparation in Religious Education. Not infrequently, RE content is absent or treated superficially in the syllabus of initial training courses for the initial years, which implies that the teacher enters the career without an adequate theoretical-methodological repertoire to address religious diversity in a critical and pedagogical way. At most, these teachers base themselves on their personal experience of faith or on generic notions of ethics and citizenship to make up for the lack of specific

training, running the risk of incurring, even if involuntarily, confessional biases or inadequate simplifications of the religious phenomenon.

In view of this problem, this article aims to carry out a critical analysis of the initial and continuing education of Religious Education teachers, with emphasis on the early years of Elementary School, discussing: the presence or absence of specific RE content in undergraduate courses, Pedagogy, other qualifications and in graduate programs; the guiding role of the BNCC and the legal frameworks in the definition of teaching competencies for RE and the teaching knowledge mobilized by these teachers, in the light of Maurice Tardif's theory, identifying training gaps and challenges for teaching practice. It is believed that an in-depth understanding of these aspects can indicate ways to improve RE teacher training, making it more consistent with the contemporary demands of school religious education.

METHODOLOGY

For the development of this study, it was decided to use a qualitative approach of bibliographic and documentary nature, focused on the analysis of the training of teachers of Religious Education. Exploratory and descriptive research was adopted, based on relevant academic and normative sources on the subject. The corpus of analysis included books, scientific articles and official documents made available by the authors and reference institutions.

The collection of information was carried out through analytical reading and filing of these sources. No direct field research was conducted with professors or courses, given the bibliographic nature of the study. Instead, we sought to analyze already published studies that investigated curricular matrices of training courses or training experiences. The methodological option for a documentary analysis is justified by the richness of available materials and the need to articulate different theoretical and normative perspectives, seeking to identify convergent and divergent points about the training of RE teachers.

The analysis developed below is structured in a thematic way, combining the data and concepts collected to discuss: the situation of initial training of RE teachers in the early years; the initiatives and issues around the continuing education of these teachers, especially in the face of the new requirements brought by the BNCC and an integrative reflection in the light of Tardif's teaching knowledge, confronting what the current training provides with what would be desirable to achieve the objectives of the curricular component.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The theoretical foundation of this study is based on two main axes, the teaching knowledge and the professional training of the teacher, as outlined by authors such as Maurice Tardif, Clermont Gauthier and Sergio Junqueira, as well as the educational assumptions of school Religious Education in the Brazilian context, including the conceptions of RE and the national curriculum guidelines (LDB/BNCC) that shape the profile of the teacher of this curricular component.

The theory of teachers' knowledge, developed by Tardif (2014) et al., offers a valuable analytical apparatus to understand what knowledge teachers mobilize in their practice and how this knowledge relates to their training. Tardif argues that the teacher's knowledge is heterogeneous, resulting from multiple formative sources and life experiences. In the words of the author, "in his work, a teacher makes use of his personal culture, which comes from his life history and his previous school culture; he is also based on certain disciplinary knowledge acquired at the university, as well as on didactic and pedagogical knowledge derived from his professional training; it is also based on what we can call curricular knowledge [...]; it is based on its own knowledge linked to work experience" (TARDIF, 2000, p. 14). This fragment shows that teachers build their work by combining knowledge of different natures: academic knowledge, experiential knowledge and personal knowledge.

In the specific case of Religious Education, this multiplicity of knowledge implies that the teacher will articulate the formal knowledge about the phenomenon with his own worldview and eventually his particular religious belonging, in addition to previous teaching and learning experiences. Maurice Tardif points out that, due to this composite nature of teaching knowledge, professional training should provide critical reflection on the various sources of knowledge that the teacher activates, so that he develops a conscious and grounded practice, and not just intuitive.

However, as Clermont Gauthier and colleagues warn, if teacher training does not provide solid theoretical and pedagogical foundations, teachers tend to resort only to common sense and their personal experience. As these authors observe, "in the absence of valid pedagogical action knowledge, the teacher [...] he will continue to resort to experience, tradition, common sense... continuing to use knowledge that [...] does not distinguish him in any way [...] from the common citizen" (GAUTHIER et al., 1998, p. 34). This critique highlights the need for professionalization of teaching: teaching, in order to affirm itself as a professional practice, requires the identification and appropriation of specific knowledge, validated by research and collective experience, which go beyond the

mere reproduction of empirical practices or personal values. Applying this idea to Religious Education, it can be inferred that, without specialized training, the teaching of this curricular component runs the risk of being conducted only based on the personal convictions of the teacher or on improvised approaches, without support in a body of academic knowledge about religion and education.

Thus, Tardif's (2014) reference on teaching knowledge guides the analysis of the competencies needed by the RE teacher, indicating that the training should integrate: conceptual knowledge about the religious phenomenon, pedagogical knowledge and knowledge of the school context, including legislation and guidelines, such as the BNCC, and the understanding of the cultural and religious diversity of students. In addition, teachers need to develop the ability to reflect on their own identity and religious experience in order not to project them improperly in the school environment, but rather to use them in a critical and balanced way for the benefit of the educational process.

The current legislation determines that RE is optional, without proselytism, respecting religious and cultural diversity (BRASIL, 1997). This means that the goal is not to catechize or convert, but to educate about the religious phenomenon in an interdisciplinary way, promoting interreligious dialogue, tolerance and understanding between different faiths.

The National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC), although it has chosen not to detail specific RE content (leaving this definition to the state and municipal education systems, according to the first paragraph of article 33 of the LDB), reinforces the importance of the component within the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences in Elementary Education. The BNCC recognizes the role of RE in contributing to integral and citizen education, in line with the principles of the secular and plural State. The current orientation is that RE should be structured as a field of knowledge that addresses the different religious manifestations and worldviews in a comparative and reflective way, without assuming any of them as the only truth. In this way, the religious knowledge to be worked on in school distances itself from the defense of confessional faith to approach a pedagogical and phenomenological proposal.

This conceptual clarification is fundamental in the training of RE teachers, teachers must deconstruct the idea that teaching religion means preaching a particular religion or just working on universal values in a decontextualized way. Instead, the formative approach should enable them to explore the religious phenomenon as a cultural, historical, and social fact, developing in students attitudes of respect and dialogue.

Therefore, the theoretical perspectives that the Religious Education teacher must be trained to articulate a solid base of academic knowledge about religion (plural and critical) with pedagogical knowledge (didactics, classroom management, evaluation) and with an ethical-secular professional attitude that reflects the legal frameworks with respect to diversity, confessional neutrality in practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

When we examine the initial training of teachers who work, or may work, in Religious Education in the early years, we find a disparity between the ideal proposed by the theoretical and legal references and the reality of the curricula of undergraduate courses. Traditionally, in Brazil, the responsibility for teaching RE classes in the early years falls on the multipurpose teacher, who graduated from Pedagogy Teaching Degree courses, since in Elementary School I usually a single teacher teaches multiple subjects to the same class. This configuration has direct consequences: if the Pedagogy course does not include content related to Religious Education, the teacher will go out into practice without any specific basis in this area.

An analysis of the curriculum matrices of several Pedagogy courses reveals that, in fact, specific contents of Religious Education are rarely present. The national guidelines for Pedagogy do not explain RE as a mandatory or even optional component, unlike the other areas, which traditionally make up the training nucleus. Thus, the insertion of curricular components such as Didactics of Religious Education or Fundamentals of Religious Education depends on the initiative of each institution. The absence of components focused on RE in initial training courses results, in part, from a history of marginalization of the religious component in the school curriculum, many universities and educators still view RE with ambiguity, either for fear of hurting secularism, or because they consider it of less academic importance.

This formative context generates a worrying picture: many beginning teachers learn to teach RE in practice, without theoretical preparation. As a consequence, there are reports of simplistic approaches in the classrooms of the early years, such as limiting oneself to activities on universal moral values or to commemorations of religious dates in an uncritical way, which can result in superficial teaching that is far from the formative objectives of the area. In certain cases, if the teacher has a strong religious experience, he can, even involuntarily, imprint confessional tones to the classes, which contradicts the non-proselytizing character required. These distortions can be understood in the light of Tardif's theory: since the teacher lacks specific professional knowledge to guide his practice,

personal knowledge, own experiences, intuitions and informal traditions prevail as the basis of teaching action.

On the other hand, there are specific degree courses for Religious Education or related areas. In recent decades, some universities have started to offer a Degree in Religious Sciences or qualification for RE within History or Social Sciences courses. These specialized courses, when well structured, tend to provide solid foundations in the history and science of religion, as well as appropriate methodologies. The graduate in Religious Sciences, in theory, should be able to act as an RE teacher in all years of Elementary and High School. However, such courses are still few in number and not very accessible nationally. Many states and municipalities still do not offer specific initial training for RE, and the hiring of teachers for the curricular component falls on pedagogues or teachers from other areas.

An important fact is that, according to the legislation (LDB art. 33 §1), it is up to the education systems to define the qualification of RE teachers. In other words, the law did not immediately create a requirement for specific nationally standardized training – it delegated this definition to the networks. This led to heterogeneous solutions: there were networks that began to require training in Religious Sciences or a certificate of specific courses, while others continued to appoint multipurpose teachers.

This lack of uniformity makes it difficult to create a clear professional identity for the RE teacher and also makes it difficult to structure initial training curricula that serve the entire country. The fact that the BNCC has not explicitly incorporated content or competencies for RE in its text has also contributed to less pressure on universities to adapt their courses. In other words, unlike other curricular components for which the BNCC established specific competencies forcing the revision of teacher training curricula, in the case of RE this influence was indirect.

Despite this general scenario, it is necessary to recognize specific initiatives and advances. In some Graduate Programs, courses focused on Religious Education have emerged, often seeking to fill the gap in initial training. In addition, there are efforts to produce RE didactic and paradidactic materials, often prepared with the participation of academic researchers, which can serve as informal training support for teachers, updating them on appropriate approaches.

In summary, the initial training of RE teachers in the early years still lacks systematization and centrality. An implicit approach predominates, it is expected that the polyvalent teacher deals with RE based on his general training, which does not ensure the acquisition of the necessary specific knowledge. This initial fragility reinforces the

importance of continuing education, as many teachers will only become aware of the demands of Religious Education and will seek training after they are already working in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The training of Religious Education teachers for the early years of Elementary School constitutes, at the same time, a field full of challenges and a strategic area for the promotion of a citizen and plural education in Brazil. In this article, we sought to critically examine how the initial and continuing education of these teachers has been configured, in the light of theoretical references, especially Tardif's theory of teaching knowledge, and the national regulatory frameworks (LDB and BNCC), as well as to identify gaps and propose ways for improvement.

To recapitulate the main findings: it was identified that initial training has significant weaknesses, Pedagogy courses, in general, do not include specific content or didactics of Religious Education, resulting in teachers poorly prepared to deal with the specificity of the religious theme in the school context. Although there are specialized degrees in some regions, they still do not meet the national demand and coexist with the lack of a unified guideline regarding the qualification for RE teaching. Continuing education, in turn, emerged as a necessary response and has intensified especially after the BNCC, with commendable initiatives to train in-service teachers on religious diversity and secular teaching methodologies. However, such initiatives need continuous and more far-reaching evaluation in order to truly transform teaching practices in a broad and sustained way.

From the point of view of mobilized teaching knowledge, we found that RE teachers often rely predominantly on experiential and personal knowledge, given the absence of more structured training knowledge. This reinforces the importance of enriching training with knowledge from academic research and pedagogical systematization.

It is concluded, therefore, that investing in the training of the teacher of Religious Education, in a perspective that ranges from the university to continuing education in service, is to invest in the quality of the Religious Education offered in schools. Only with well-trained teachers will it be possible to ensure that RE fulfills its educational role: to contribute to the formation of children and young people capable of understanding and respecting the diversity of beliefs and convictions, to dialogue about existential and ethical issues in an open and informed way, and to exercise citizenship in a plural society. This is a major objective that aligns with the principles of an integral and democratic education.

REFERENCES

1. Brasil. (1997). Lei nº 9.475, de 22 de julho de 1997. Altera a redação do art. 33 da Lei nº 9.394/96, que estabelece as diretrizes e bases da educação nacional. *Diário Oficial da União*, Brasília, DF, 23 jul. 1997.
2. Brasil. Ministério da Educação. (2017). *Base Nacional Comum Curricular – Educação Fundamental*. Brasília, DF: MEC.
3. Gauthier, C., Martineau, S., Desbiens, J.-F., Mallette, S., & Bédard, J. (1998). *Por uma teoria da pedagogia: Pesquisas contemporâneas sobre o saber docente*. Ijuí: Unijuí.
4. Junqueira, S. R. A., & Santos, R. (2019). Saberes docentes: Referencial para organização da formação docente. *Paralellus Revista de Estudos de Religião - UNICAP*, 10(24), 295–323. <https://doi.org/10.25247/paralellus.2019.v10n24.p295-323>
5. Junqueira, S. R. A., & Fracaro Rodrigues, E. M. (2013). A relação entre a formação do professor e a identidade do Ensino Religioso. *Formação Docente – Revista Brasileira de Pesquisa sobre Formação de Professores*, 5(8), 121–135.
6. Tardif, M. (2000). Saberes profissionais dos professores e conhecimentos universitários: Elementos para uma epistemologia da prática profissional dos professores e suas consequências em relação à formação para o magistério. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, (13), 5–24. https://educa.fcc.org.br/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1413-24782000000100002&lng=pt&nrm=iso
7. Tardif, M. (2014). *Saberes docentes e formação profissional* (17th ed.). Petrópolis: Vozes.
8. Xavier, B. S., & Junqueira, S. R. A. (2024). Formação continuada para professores(as) para a implantação do projeto de Ensino Religioso a partir da Base Nacional Comum Curricular. *Caminhos – Revista de Ciências da Religião*, 22(3), 707–717.