

ARTICLE

**MAKING SUBALTERNITY: THE LUNCH LADIES IN THE DOCUMENTS AND INITIATIVES OF THE FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION OF THE PNAE<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper deals with the lunch lady (Merendeira), a professional responsible for preparing school meals in Brazilian public schools and who plays a key role in achieving the goals of the National School Meals Program (PNAE), such as contributing to the biopsychosocial growth and development, learning, school performance and the formation of healthy eating habits for students. Despite the lunch lady's importance for the Program, the educational potential of this professional is often invisible and unrecognized in the school environment. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate what are the documents and initiatives developed by the federal management of PNAE that involve the lunch lady and if they can contribute to the (de)valorization of her profession and her maintenance as a subject that does not participate in the school environment's decisions, reinforcing her subaltern position. The document analysis allowed us to verify that PNAE has a legal framework to strengthen and enhance the roles of the lunch ladies, especially concerning the role of educator. However, the results of this analysis suggest that the actions are focused on the scope of registration in the official discourse more than on representation/representation, which can contribute to the lunch lady's social discredit and the consolidation of their role as a subordinate subject.

**Keywords:** merendeira, food education, school feeding, public policies, education.

**PRODUZINDO A SUBALTERNIDADE: AS MERENDEIRAS NOS DOCUMENTOS E INICIATIVAS DA GESTÃO FEDERAL DO PNAE**

**RESUMO:** Neste trabalho, tratamos da merendeira, profissional responsável pelo preparo da alimentação escolar das escolas públicas brasileiras, a qual exerce um papel fundamental no atingimento dos objetivos do Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar (PNAE), como contribuir para o crescimento e o desenvolvimento biopsicossocial, para a aprendizagem, para o rendimento escolar e para a formação de hábitos alimentares saudáveis dos estudantes. Apesar da importância da merendeira para

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esse Programa, o potencial educativo dessa profissional é, muitas vezes, invisibilizado e não reconhecido no âmbito escolar. Diante disso, este estudo teve como objetivos averiguar quais são os documentos e as iniciativas desenvolvidos pela gestão federal do PNAE que envolvem a merendeira e se eles podem contribuir para a (des)valorização de sua profissão e para a sua manutenção como sujeito não participante das decisões no âmbito escolar, reforçando sua posição de subalternidade. A análise documental nos permitiu verificar que o PNAE possui arcabouço legal para fortalecer e valorizar os papéis das merendeiras, especialmente no que se refere à função de educadora. Porém, os resultados dessa análise sugerem que as ações ficam voltadas para o âmbito da inscrição no discurso oficial mais do que no da representação/representatividade, o que pode contribuir para o desprestígio social da merendeira e a consolidação de sua função enquanto sujeito subalterno.

**Palavras-chave:** merendeira, educação alimentar, alimentação escolar, políticas públicas, educação.

### **PRODUCIENDO SUBALTERNIDAD: LAS COCINERAS EN LOS DOCUMENTOS E INICIATIVAS DE LA ADMINISTRACIÓN FEDERAL DEL PNAE**

**RESUMEN:** En este artículo abordamos a la comensal (Merendeira), profesional responsable de la preparación de las comidas escolares en las escuelas públicas brasileñas y que desempeña un papel fundamental en la consecución de los objetivos del Programa Nacional de Alimentación Escolar (PNAE): contribuir al crecimiento y desarrollo biopsicosocial, al aprendizaje, al rendimiento escolar y a la formación de hábitos alimentarios saludables de los alumnos. A pesar de la importancia de la señora del almuerzo para ese Programa, el potencial educativo de esta profesional suele ser invisible y no se reconoce en el entorno escolar. Ante esto, este estudio tuvo como objetivo investigar cuáles son los documentos e las iniciativas desarrolladas por la dirección federal del PNAE que involucran a la comensal y si ellos pueden contribuir para (des)valoración de su profesión y para su mantenimiento como un sujeto que no participa en las decisiones dentro de la escuela, reforzando su posición de subalternidad. El análisis documental permitió comprobar que el PNAE cuenta con un marco legal para fortalecer y potenciar las funciones de las comensales, especialmente en lo que respecta al rol de educadora. Sin embargo, los resultados del análisis sugieren que las acciones se centran más en el alcance del registro en el discurso oficial que en la representación/representación, lo que puede contribuir a su descrédito social y a la consolidación de su papel como sujeto subalterno.

**Palabra-clave:** merendeira, educación alimentaria, alimentación escolar, políticas públicas, educación.

## INTRODUCTION

At first, this study intends to highlight a subordinate figure, the lunch lady (Merendeira). If you are from other areas and do not yet know the meaning of the expression “subaltern” used here, please do not misunderstand us. Subaltern, here, refers to Subaltern Studies, which are interested in those individuals who, in the context of the production of coloniality as a structure, were silenced, prevented from speaking, and withdrawn to the interior so that their expression did not gain strength outside the domains of the popular, preventing their transit beyond the lines previously designed for their social mobility – or their maintenance in a certain status (SPIVAK, 2010; SPIVAK, 2013).

From this perspective, the subaltern enjoys the same lack of social prestige as the popular, being the equivalent of the latter in theoretical terms, just as class is to poverty, as Spivak (2013a) speculates, while one word tends towards rationality, the other aims at rationality representation through desire. In this article, we do not intend to give voice or to represent the process of exclusion that places the lunch lady at the back of the school, but to create the conditions, Spivakian speaking (2010), so that, when this subject<sup>4</sup> can speak, she can be heard, collaborating to the production of critical mass on the theme<sup>5</sup>, provoking university institutions to perceive these people, contributing so that their conditions of arrival in the theoretical debate are not only a topic of interest, but as an action that arouses the concrete articulation of these individuals, as a group, and the creation of conditions to be heard (SPIVAK, 2010; SAID, 2012). By highlighting this subaltern figure, we intend to collaborate with this proposal from a critical reading of documents that deal directly with subaltern work, but about it is silenced, working, in some documents, the production of this invisibility and, in others, the trace, impropriety, etc.

In this article, we will deal with a figure that all those who have attended a public school in Brazil know by different nicknames, all of them accompanied by a feminine noun with an adjective function: “of the snack”. Whether aunt, girl, or even called directly by the job designation, she is the lunch lady. There are few studies focused on the school cook, which demonstrate that this function is predominantly performed by women, brown or black, with low education and belonging to the lower social classes (FERNANDES; FONSECA; SILVA, 2014; KUTZ, 2018; TEO; SABEDOT; SCHAFFER, 2010; LIMA; CARVALHO, 2016). This person has a fundamental role in the education of millions of children, young people, and adults in our country, however, the interest in it does not correspond directly to the importance of the position it occupies at school. Thus, we will present, in this article, evidence of these facts through the reading of legal, regulatory, and organizing provisions of public policies aimed at Brazilian school meals.

Food is an essential and constitutive part of the human being and makes up what we call culture in any society. Eating is an act that goes beyond physiological needs. Food relates the organic, intellectual, psychological, cultural, and spiritual dimensions, involving the expression and construction of our identity (POLLAN, 2008; VALENTE, 2014). Through food, we can activate elements of subjectivity that inform us who we are, wherever we are and a public policy that intends to act directly in a dimension of the culture of the individuals, in their food, says a lot about how we produce representations of what we understand by ourselves.

The National School Feeding Program (PNAE- *Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*) is a public education policy with a social character, linked to the National Education Development Fund (FNDE- *Fundo Nacional de Desenvolvimento da Educação*) of the Ministry of Education (MEC). Its origin dates back to 1955, and it is considered one of the largest programs in the area of school feeding in the world, serving, universally and free of charge, students enrolled in basic education in public, philanthropic, and community schools in all municipalities in the country (BRASIL, 1955, 2009 and 2020).

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<sup>4</sup> We will use the term “subject” here because it is an expression of the field, translated from Portuguese *sujeito*, which does not have a gender originally in English, but in Portuguese it gains the masculine gender. This difficulty will be expressed throughout the text. We tried to reduce its use, but it was unavoidable. Respecting precedence, we note here that this warning takes place in the work of Grada Kilomba (2019), which we mention when producing this note and talking about this difficulty.

<sup>5</sup> One of the authors of this article developed a master's thesis on school cooks (MELGAÇO, Mariana Belloni. *As Merendeiras do DF: Voz e Silêncio no Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*. Dissertation (Master's in Education) – Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, 2021).

Over the more than 60 years, since its implementation, the PNAE has undergone several resignifications and restructurings that have enabled it to strengthen it (PEIXINHO, 2013). Currently, it is conceived as a public policy of a universal, educational, sustainable, and healthy nature and is aligned with a set of structuring actions to promote the Human Right to Adequate Food (HRAF) and Food and Nutrition Security<sup>6</sup> (FNS). The PNAE is an education program in the broadest sense, and therein lies its potential for transformation.

The legal framework of the PNAE, Law 11,947, of June 16, 2009 (BRASIL, 2009), defines school meals as the offer, during the school period, of any food in the school environment. According to Article 4, the Program must contribute both to the biopsychosocial development of students and their school performance and the formation of healthy eating habits. This objective must be met not only by offering healthy meals but also through Food and Nutrition Education (FNE) actions.

By providing access to a diversified and healthy diet PNAE, contributes to the school, personal and social development, of both students and of those who, directly or indirectly, are linked to the Program (CASAGRANDE; CANCELIER; BELING, 2021). PNAE is considered an innovation in public policies for associating the offer of healthy school meals with sustainable procurement initiatives, articulated with the strengthening of family farming and with the FNS of students (KROTH; GEREMIA; MUSSIO, 2020).

On the other hand, FNE strategies can efficiently contribute to the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases, such as for overweight and obesity, developing the critical capacity of subjects for healthy food choices that are appropriate to their sociocultural context (SANTOS, 2016). According to Recine (2017), the PNAE has undergone several improvements both in the quality of food and the promotion of local development, as well as measures aimed at expanding and qualifying another essential dimension of the Program, which is the promotion of adequate and healthy food through FNE strategies.

Resolution 6, of May 8, 2020 (BRASIL, 2020), in its Article 14, emphasizes the importance of including FNE in the teaching and learning process. This fact must permeate, in a cross-sectional way, the school curriculum, approaching the themes of food and nutrition and the development of practices and skills that promote healthy lifestyles, from the perspective of FNS. This Resolution also defines the FNE as follows:

§ 1º For the PNAE, FNE is the set of training actions, of continuous and permanent, transdisciplinary, intersectoral, and multi-professional practice, which aim to encourage the voluntary adoption of healthy food choices and practices that collaborate for learning, the state of student health, and the individual's quality of life (BRASIL, 2020, p. 6).

The PNAE is governed by legal regulations, which provide a robust foundation for the implementation of FNE in the school environment. The FNE actions are essential for the Program to achieve its objectives, which are to contribute to biopsychosocial growth and development, learning, school performance, and the formation of healthy eating practices for students (BRASIL, 2009).

In addition to all the legal support that the PNAE gives to FNE in schools, some documents and regulations strengthen and support the FNE as the Food and Nutritional Education Reference Framework for Public Policies (BRASIL, 2012). The launch of this Framework reinforces the initiatives created by the FNDE that are intended to promote the HRAF, proposing that the educational processes are lasting and favor the promotion of self-care and self-esteem, that the actions contemplate the entire food system, and that there is dialogue and listening for a respectful, democratic FNE practice attuned to the real needs of population groups and social changes.

The publication of Interministerial Ordinance number 1010, of May 8, 2006, by the Ministries of Health and Education, established guidelines for the promotion of healthy eating in basic education in public and private schools, with the FNE as one of the priority axes of action (BRASIL, 2006a). Law 13,666, of May 16, 2018, amended Law 9,394, of December 20, 1996 (BRASIL, 1996), the Law on National Education Guidelines and Bases (*LDB- Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional*), to include food education and nutrition as a cross-sectional theme in the school curriculum. This law made

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<sup>6</sup> Food and Nutrition Security is the performance of everyone's right to regular and permanent access to quality food, in sufficient quantity, without compromising access to other essential needs, based on health-promoting food practices that respect cultural diversity and are environmentally, culturally, economically and socially sustainable (BRASIL, 2006, p. 1).

it mandatory to include the topic of food and nutrition education in the curricula of elementary and high schools in their science and biology subjects, respectively (BRASIL, 2018).

To achieve healthy eating in the school environment, this Ordinance recommends the implementation of several actions, such as the involvement of the entire school community in the definition of strategies that favor healthy food choices; and the awareness and training of professionals involved with school meals, to produce and offer healthier foods. It also proposes the incorporation of the theme of healthy eating in the political pedagogical project (PPP) of the school, permeating all areas of study and providing experiences in the daily life of school activities. Some studies indicate the importance of including the FNE in the PPP of schools, allowing the construction of program contents for school meals to be a richer, and more participatory experience (CASEMIRO; FONSECA; MACHADO; PERES, 2015).

In a study carried out in municipalities in the state of Goiás, to identify and characterize FNE actions in the PNAE, we found that most of them have the theme of food and nutrition in the PPP of their schools and that 91.1% of these municipalities carried out actions of FNE, but with half-yearly frequency (one-off actions) and predominantly use of passive teaching-learning methods. Despite the achievements in this area, the gap between theoretical discourse and educational practice remains (SILVA; MONEGO; SOUSA; ALMEIDA, 2018).

Similar results were found in a study carried out with 749 municipalities that participated in the *Prêmio Gestor Eficiente da Merenda Escolar* in 2010. Ottoni, Oliveira, and Bandoni (2019) found that most of these municipalities reported the presence of FNE in their school curriculum, however, less than half used some active method, with the school garden is the most mentioned. The existence of FNE in the school curriculum was positively associated with the implementation of vegetable gardens, a result that shows the importance of the presence of content on food and nutrition in the pedagogical curricula of Brazilian schools.

Araújo et al. (2017) carried out a systematic review of articles and scientific works about the impact of FNE on the prevention and control of overweight among schoolchildren, between 2005 and 2015, in the country. The results of this study pointed to changes in the eating behavior of schoolchildren and an improvement in knowledge about healthy eating. The study also found a low number of published scientific works on the topic of FNE, in the period studied. The authors concluded that FNE actions should be encouraged and recognized the need for further research in the area, especially those that consider, in their methodology, the culture of values, beliefs, and attitudes of people that are related to food.

Santos (2005, 2012) observed the growing importance given to food and nutrition education in the documents that elaborate public policies in the field of food and nutrition in Brazil. Despite the advance in discourses on the topic, it is not perceived in the daily practices developed by professionals in the FNE area. According to the studies mentioned and the documents and normative instruments (BRASIL, 2012, 2020a), for the FNE to be effective, it must occur in an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary way and involve the entire school community. Among the school employees and the subjects of the PNAE, there are, precisely, the lunch ladies.

The school lunch ladies are responsible for preparing and distributing school meals. However, the role they play within the school is not limited to preparing food and cleaning the physical areas where meals are handled and served - even if these roles, far beyond the work of food handling, are not recognized by other people of education or find little representation in the legal frameworks we analyzed. The lunch ladies maintain daily and direct contact with the students, playing a fundamental role in food and nutrition education and the formation of healthy eating habits in schoolchildren. This role, combined with the contact with students within the school, creates an affective bond, sometimes underestimated by the educational system, which places the lunch lady in a primordial role of educator, in cultural terms.

When carrying out a systematic review of the FNE, Santos (2016) found that the approach to this topic in the context of school feeding is far from being carried out in an interdisciplinary way and within a problematizing and dialogic proposal. This occurs due to the inadequate training of the nutritionist, based on a technical and biomedical model, the low commitment of the managers, and also the absence of dialogue between the subjects involved in the PNAE.

Another review study on the same topic in the school environment, carried out by Borsoi, Teo, and Mussio (2016), identified that one of the major obstacles of the FNE may be the reductionist logic of information transmission. In this way, innovative mechanisms to promote healthy, cross-sectional, contextualized, and more successful eating habits must be sought and used. Pedraza et al. (2018), when carrying out a summary analysis of the evaluative research on the PNAE, found that the performance of the lunch ladies was one of the least discussed topics. The inadequacy in the planning and management of the Program harms the performance of the lunch ladies, even though they are, admittedly, essential to the PNAE.

As it plays such a strategic role within the school and the PNAE, this study aims to find out what are the documents, actions, and regulations of the Program that relate to the role of the lunch lady in schools and to analyze whether they can contribute to the (de)valuation of their profession and their maintenance as a subject that does not participate in decisions in the school environment, reinforcing their subordinate position in a context in which they play a primordial and relevant role in the training of current and future generations of students.

## METHODOLOGY

To better understand the roles of the lunch lady, we consider it necessary to analyze which are the documents, legislation, and PNAE projects that relate to this professional. For this purpose, we selected the current regulations and initiatives of the last five years developed by the federal management of the PNAE. The analysis of these documents may favor a broader view of the role that school lunch ladies perform, according to the PNAE, in addition to showing how they can influence the role assumed by them.

For this research, the items listed in the chart below will be analyzed.

CHART 1 – Description of the items analyzed in the documentary research

<b>ANALYZED ITEMS</b>	<b>TYPE</b>
<b>Law n° 11.947, of June 16, 2009</b>	Legislation
<b>Resolution/CD/FNDE n° 6, of May 8, 2020 and Resolution/CD/FNDE n° 20, of December 2, 2020</b>	Legislation
<b>PNAE technical notes</b>	Normative
<b>Guidance material [sic] for training food handlers who work in school meals</b>	Manual
<b>Technical products of CECANEs</b>	Product
<b>“Best School Meal Recipes” Contest</b>	Project
<b>Super Lunch Ladies</b>	Reality Show television program
<b>FNE's Journey</b>	FNE Project
<b>Fourth cover of textbooks</b>	FNE Project
<b>PNAE Monitoring Questionnaire</b>	Monitoring instrument

Source: Created by the authors.

The analysis of these items started from the need to understand the place of the lunch ladies in the set of documents of the PNAE. In them, we searched for the word “lunch lady”, as well as for “*merend*”\*, and for related terms, such as “food”, “feeding”, “meal” etc., which could also indicate how the authors of such normative provisions appropriated this category (CHARTIER, 2003). I understand them as an official appropriation that ends up guiding national, regional, state, and municipal policies around school meals.

From this survey, we compared the material collected with authors who have been studying the FNE (CASEMIRO; FONSECA; MACHADO; PERES, 2015; OTTONI; OLIVEIRA; BANDONI, 2019; SANTOS, 2005; 2012) and the PNAE (CASAGRANDE; CANCELIER; BELING, 2021; KROTH; GEREMIA; MUSSIO, 2020; RECINE, 2017) nationally and, preferably, we dialogue with the critical tradition of Subaltern Studies, as we understand that there is an echo between the position of the subaltern subject in the arrangements of coloniality and the place occupied by the lunch lady in the school spaces, while these studies work as a political framework for interpretations (SPIVAK, 2013), in which we can give some explanations about the events. For the development of this study, we also understand Subaltern Studies as bricoleurs (KINCHELOE; BERRY, 2007; MATOS-DE-SOUZA et al., 2021), as we use different theoretical traditions when they respond more adequately to the phenomenon studied.

## WHAT THE DOCUMENTS SAY

### Law nº 11.947/2009: dealing with formation without saying the person in training

Law 11,947/2009 (BRASIL, 2009), the legal framework of the PNAE, does not have any specific article on the role of lunch ladies or food handlers – the latter expression being the object of criticism in this article. Although these women play an important role and are recognized as individuals in the training process, according to the legal provision, they do not gain representation in the legal framework. However, the aforementioned law emphasizes the responsibility of the FNDE to train the people involved in the execution of school meals:

Article 16. It is incumbent upon the Union, through the FNDE, the autarchy responsible for coordinating the PNAE, to carry out the following attributions:  
[...] VI – To cooperate in the process of training the human resources involved in the execution of the PNAE and social control. (BRAZIL, 2009).

The lunch ladies, belonging to the group of individuals involved in the execution of the PNAE, must receive training promoted by the FNDE within the scope of the Program, as provided by law. The training of these professionals can occur via nutritionists. In the Support Manual for Nutritionist Technical Activities within the PNAE - *Manual de apoio para atividades técnicas do nutricionista no âmbito do PNAE* (FNDE, 2018), a document that guides the performance of this PNAE professional, the nutritionist is encouraged to act in partnership with the school community, to strengthen and disseminate actions and ideas about FNE at school. According to Resolution 465/2010 of the Federal Council of Nutritionists (CFN, 2010), which provides for the attributions of the school feeding nutritionist:

**Art. 3º.** It is incumbent upon the nutritionist, linked to the Executing Entity, within the scope of the School Feeding Program (SFP), to perform the following mandatory activities:

[...]

**IV.** To propose and carry out food and nutrition education actions for the school community, including promoting ecological and environmental awareness, articulating with the school's management and pedagogical coordination for the planning of activities with the content of food and nutrition;

[...]

**VI.** To plan, guide and supervise the activities of selection, purchase, storage, production, and distribution of food, ensuring the quantity, quality, and conservation of products, always observing good hygienic-sanitary practices;

[...]

**X.** To guide and supervise the activities of cleaning environments, food storage, food transport vehicles, equipment, and utensils of the institution;

**Art. 4º.** It is incumbent upon the nutritionist, linked to the Executing Entity, within the scope of the School Feeding Program (SFP), to carry out the following complementary activities:

**I.** To coordinate, supervise and execute actions of permanent education in food and nutrition for the school community;

[...]

**IV.** To participate in the recruitment, selection, and training of personnel who work directly in the execution of the SFP;

- V. To participate in multidisciplinary teams designed to plan, implement, control, and execute policies, programs, courses, research, and events in the area of school meals; [...]
- VII. To collaborate in the training of professionals in the area of food and nutrition, supervising interns, and participating in improvement, qualification, and training programs. (CFN, 2010).

As supported by the legislation, the training of lunch ladies, in addition to being essential for the proper execution of the PNAE, must be an articulated action between school feeding managers and nutritionists. Each school and each municipality have a reality known as the nutritionist, that is, the cultural role played by the trainer is recognized, to the same extent that it is silent about the subject who deals directly with the school kitchen. According to the attributions provided for in CFN Resolution 465/2010 (CFN, 2010), the nutritionist works in a set of technical actions of the PNAE, getting involved in various school feeding activities.

The nutritionist, as the technician responsible for the PNAE, must work together with the area of education, promoting the articulation between health knowledge and educational knowledge. By articulating and composing these interlocations, this professional re-signifies their performance for a possibility of social transformation. All his attributions and the fact that he is inserted in the contexts of the school and the municipality, knowing their realities and acting in these microcosms, enable them as an important training agent for the people involved in school feeding. The training of lunch ladies is one of the PNAE nutritionists' attributions. Thus, it is up to the FNDE to promote actions that enable and encourage it in this task. This training should not only focus on health issues but also strengthen the role of the school lunch lady as a food and nutrition educator.

Government investments are necessary for the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies that encourage the promotion and maintenance of adequate and healthy food in the school environment. Emphasis should be given to adequate funding in the execution of the Program and the continuous training of the actors involved with the coordination and execution of FNE actions. (SILVA; MONEGO; SOUSA; ALMEIDA, 2018, p. 2679).

The training of nutritionists implies not only the review of their legally foreseen attributions but also the reflection on the scope of food and nutrition education guided by the PNAE legislation (BRASIL, 2009, 2020) and by the Food and Nutrition Education Reference Framework - *Marco de referência de educação alimentar e nutricional para as políticas públicas* - for public policies (BRASIL, 2012). These documents reinforce the importance of multi-professional, cross-sectional, and interdisciplinary knowledge, enabling the creation of a more sensitive look by the nutritionist for professionals in the school community, especially the lunch ladies.

The qualification of lunch ladies, not only in operational terms but also in the pedagogical process that involves the provision of school meals, is an item of paramount importance for the implementation of food and nutrition education provided for in the PNAE. The periodic qualification of school lunch ladies enables quality school meals and compliance with one of the Program's guidelines (PINHO; MARTÍNEZ, 2016). For Santos (2016), the training in FNE of the actors involved in health promotion, in the school environment, allows the sharing of experiences, the theoretical basis, and the elaboration of strategies for the promotion and offer of an adequate and healthy diet. Courses, workshops, and discussion groups must be based on a social-constructive and problematizing approach, abandoning the traditional and non-dialogical models so often used. The nutritionist is the professional qualified to train and sensitize other school actors in FNE.

Kroth, Geremia, and Mussio (2020), when analyzing the PNAE as a Healthy Public Policy that translates into great returns for society, suggest mechanisms that must be articulated with each other for the improvement and strengthening of the Program. Among the actions indicated is the elaboration of a PNAE technical training plan for federated entities, involving all the actors of the Program, such as nutritionists, lunch ladies, and teachers. According to the authors, “in times when the rational use of government resources is much discussed, prioritizing public policies with a great multiplier effect should be the natural path to be followed by the public sector” (KROTH; GEREMIA; MUSSIO, 2020, p. 4073).

We understand that the concrete work of the lunch ladies, whose profile is very close to that of kitchen workers in our country, intersects race and gender (JANUÁRIO et al, 2019) and goes beyond



carrying, in this intersection, marks that subordinate them in a context marked by the coloniality of thought. Their role also represents the variety of their work within the scope of the precariat (STANDING, 2017), whose permanent training, promoted by external agents, bears little relation to their daily work.

The lunch ladies were left out of the terms of Law n° 11.947/2009 (BRASIL, 2009), which allows us to read their non-place in the field of the discourse of the individuals who effectively program public policy in the school environment. Many of the processes of oppression and violence that women go through, especially black women, in the context of work, make the active subject invisible. This is the first violence that authorizes others within this relationship, which, in the harsh words of Collins (2019, p. 99), reproduces the place of black women in a subordinate position, like the mule of the world: “As dehumanized objects, mules they are living machines and can be treated as part of the landscape”. The landscape, in the school context, contains a kitchen, and there is the lunch lady, as part of the machinery and utensils, which does not even appear in the law that deals with her training.

### **Resolution/CD/FNDE No. 6/2020 and Resolution/CD/FNDE No. 20/2020: from reduction to technical expression**

Resolution 6/2020 (BRASIL, 2020) provides school meals to basic education students within the scope of the PNAE. Although this represents an advance, as it textually mentions lunch ladies, this Resolution ignores the entire process of producing the imagination of women who work in school kitchens, appearing in the device as food handlers, which represents a reduction of the subject and their role, in the school community, to the cold letter of the law. When analyzing this legislation, it is possible to verify that the role of the school lunch lady is addressed in the following articles:

Art. 14 It is the responsibility of Seduc, the Municipal Government and the federal school, within their respective administrative jurisdiction, through the coordinated action of education professionals and the technical manager and other nutritionists, to include food and nutrition education - FNE in the process of teaching and learning, which crosses the school curriculum, addressing the topic of food and nutrition and the development of practices and skills that promote healthy lifestyles, from the perspective of food and nutrition security.

Art. 42 It is up to the EEx or the EUx to adopt hygienic-sanitary control measures that guarantee physical conditions and processes suitable for good food handling and processing practices in the acquisition, transport, storage, preparation/handling, and distribution of food to students served by the Program.

[...]

§ 2 There must be periodic training of food handlers to implement good practices and SOPs<sup>7</sup>. (BRASIL, 2020).

Concerning the FNE, the aforementioned Resolution refers to the need for joint action by education professionals and school nutrition nutritionists. Understanding the lunch lady as an education employee, it is possible to verify that the legislation recognizes her strategic role in the implementation of food and nutrition education actions integrated into the teaching and learning processes of the school.

Article 42 reinforces the importance of measures that guarantee the supply of healthy food and within adequate hygienic-sanitary conditions. For this to occur, it is essential to train the lunch ladies, as discussed in the previous item. However, in this article, which explicitly mentions the role of food handlers, there is only an alert for the technical and hygienist issue of the work of lunch ladies, with no mention of their role as a school feeding educator. For food and nutrition education to be effective, school lunch ladies must be qualified both in operations and in how much they relate to the educational issues of their work and are recognized as such.

Resolution 20/2020 (BRASIL, 2020a) changes some items of Resolution 6/2020 (BRASIL, 2020), but the analysis of the former indicated that there was no change on the points addressed in this study.

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<sup>7</sup> SOPs: Standard Operating Procedures

## PNAE technical notes: normative invisibility

PNAE currently has fifteen technical notes aimed at ratifying the understandings, clarifying the Program's legislation, monitoring and meeting external demands, such as those of the Public Ministry, complaints, among others. The technical notes (FNDE, 2021) are prepared by the PNAE Coordination and help the good execution of the Program. These documents are available for access and consultation on the FNDE website. Below, we show a chart containing the description of the technical notes prepared by the PNAE Coordination.

CHART 2 – Description of the technical notes referring to the PNAE prepared by the PNAE Coordination

TECHNICAL NOTES	DESCRIPTION
Technical Note n° 2139545/2020	Changes in the aspects of Food and Nutrition and Family Agriculture provided for in Resolution CD/FNDE n° 20, of December 2, 2020
Technical Note n° 1894784/2020	Update of recommendations for planning menus for daycare centers served by the National School Feeding Program – PNAE
Technical Note n° 1894673/2020	Update of recommendations on vegetarian food in the National School Feeding Program - PNAE
Technical Note n° 1897361/2020	Changes to the aspects of Family Farming of Resolution CD/FNDE n° 6, of May 8, 2020
Technical Note n° 1879810/2020	Changes to the Food and Nutrition and Food and Nutrition Security aspects of Resolution CD/FNDE n° 6, of May 8, 2020
Technical Note n° 5007/2016	Specification of foodstuffs for the National School Feeding Program - PNAE
Technical Note n° 5006/2016	Acquisition of bottled mineral water by the PNAE
Technical Note n° 5004/2016	Clarifications on the acquisition of foodstuffs for the PNAE directly from Family Agriculture
Technical Note n° 5003/2016	Acquisition of foodstuffs directly from family farms
Technical Note n° 5002/2016	Food Inventory Control in the PNAE
Technical Note n° 03/2014	Financial transfer from PNAE to the More Education Program
Technical Note n° 02/2014	Purchase of powdered milk for school meals
Technical Note n° 04/2013	Inclusion of fish in school meals
Technical Note n° 01/2013	Mandatory pasteurization of milk for acquisition and supply in School Feeding
Technical Note n° 02/2012	Regulation of school cafeterias in public schools in Brazil
Technical Note n° 01/2012	Positioning of the General Coordination of the School Feeding Program regarding the acquisition of orange juice for school meals
Nota Técnica n° 01/2011	COTAN's positioning with fruit-based drinks replacing fruit in school meals
Technical Note n° 01/2009	Minuta sobre a parte de Nutrição da Resolução 38/2009

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data obtained from the FNDE website (2021).

When analyzing the technical notes, we verified that there is not one that directly addresses the functions or roles of the lunch ladies in the Program. The documents available from 2009 to 2020, address issues related to food, menus, family farming, among other topics. But, so far, they have not included a subject related to food and nutrition education, which is one of the Program's guidelines, nor about the lunch ladies, which has a strategic role for the good execution of the PNAE. Technical notes

that reinforce the importance of food and nutrition education for the PNAE and the educational role of the school lunch lady can collaborate to improve the management of the Program and to comply with its guidelines. The absence of a technical note on the lunch lady, or the FNE, corroborates the invisibility of this professional.

### Guidance material [sic] for training food handlers who work in school meals

*The Guidance Material [sic] for the training of food handlers who work in school meals (Material orientativo [sic] para formação de manipuladores de alimentos que atuam na alimentação escolar)* (BRASIL, 2014) is a document financed and published by the MEC/FNDE. It was prepared by the Collaborating Center for Food and Nutrition for Schoolchildren (CECANE- *Colaborador Alimentação e Nutrição do Escolar*) of the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), in 2014. The material's main objective is to “provide a theoretical and scientific basis for the planning and implementation of PNAE food handlers” (BRASIL, 2014, p. 7). The material also presents suggestions for practical activities.

In chapter 2, entitled Training of Handlers, this material reflects on the role of educator of the food handler (BRASIL, 2014). It is a very important item, but it could be better explored. The activities that can be developed by the food handler in schools are also pointed out. Below, we present a chart containing the description of the possible activities of the food handler available in the guidance material:

CHART 3 – Description of possible activities of the PNAE food handler

• Guaranteeing quality food for schoolchildren, both in terms of nutrition and hygienic-sanitary matters;
• Assisting in the formation of healthy eating habits (educator role);
• Producing meals complying with the menus, following the technical sheets (recipes) and good handling practices;
• Offering the food produced, promoting the adequate consumption of food;
• Assisting in the application of acceptability test;
• Performing tasks related to the area of pre-preparation and food preparation and distribution of meals, following the instructions contained in the manual of good practices, such as Receiving, cleaning, and storing food, ensuring their quality; Inventory control (organization, validity, and quantity of products); Temperature control; Sample collection; Cleaning of utensils and equipment (when there is no specific professional); Cleaning the environment (when there is no specific professional);
• Communicating PNAE irregularities to legal guardians, as it is also part of social control.

Source: Prepared by the authors, from the text *Material orientativo [sic] para formação de manipuladores de alimentos que atuam na alimentação escolar* (BRASIL, 2014, p. 15).

The elaboration and dissemination of materials, such as those mentioned above, contribute to the training of the school lunch lady – in the materials, she is always treated by a food handler – and also to the strengthening of her role within the school. Her role as an educator must always be reinforced both for the professional herself and for other PNAE individuals who have access to these documents. The review and updating of this material, released in 2014, can contribute to the appreciation of the lunch lady.

### Technical products of CECANEs

The FNDE establishes partnerships with federal public universities through the CECANEs, for the development of technical products for the PNAE. One of these technical products was the development of a methodology for training lunch ladies by CECANE/UFRGS (*Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*), in 2007. Courses were held for 226 handlers linked to the State Department of Education of Rio Grande do Sul, in 2007 and 2008 (BRASIL, 2014).

Chaves (2011) surveyed the training of lunch ladies from the perspective of educators and promoters of healthy eating in schools, in the training processes carried out by CECANEs. The author found that lunch ladies are valued through motivation and awareness and that there is a concern to stimulate reflection on their practice and to encourage creativity for the possibilities of eating. Chaves (2011) also reinforces the need for educational activities to be permanent, which enables the development of skills and attitudes of these professionals.

Camozzi, Monego, Menezes, and Silva (2015, p. 36) highlight the importance of spaces that offer permanent education for school lunch ladies and other subjects in the school community, for the development of actions to promote healthy eating in the school environment:

It seems evident the need for continuing education programs that address not only issues related to hygiene in food handling, but also forms of preparation, menu structure, seeking to understand the role of the handler as an agent promoting healthy eating in the school space, offering healthy and varied preparations, and contemplating cultural aspects of the consumer people, restricting the supply of foods with excess fat, sugar or salt.

Currently, technical products aimed at training school lunch ladies are no longer signed. The coordination of the PNAE has focused on the training of nutritionists. As the training of school lunch ladies is one of the tasks of these school feeding professionals, as stated in CFN Resolution n° 465/2010 (CFN, 2010), the FNDE has opted for their training, as discussed above, but the lack of training specifically dedicated to school lunch ladies, within the actions of the PNAE, subordinates them to nutritionists.

We question and reflect on whether it would not be important to resume the training of school lunch ladies by CECANEs, which have a technical, operational, and intellectual framework to produce this technical product, being able to carry out periodic training of school lunch ladies both in issues health and hygienists, especially in educational issues, strengthening their strategic role in promoting healthy and adequate food in schools.

### **“Best School Meal Recipes” Contest**

The “*Best School Feeding Recipes*” contest took place in two editions. The first edition took place in 2015 and the second in 2017. It consisted of choosing, disseminating, and awarding culinary recipes prepared by school lunch ladies, who worked in public elementary schools (BRASIL, 2015a; FNDE, 2017). The objective of the contest was “to value the role of school lunch ladies in promoting healthy and adequate food in the school environment and to promote the mobilization of the school community for the theme of food and nutrition education” (BRASIL, 2015a; FNDE, 2017).

The first edition had the registration of 2,433 lunch ladies. Five of them had their recipes awarded and received the amount of R\$ 5,000.00 (five thousand reais) and a trip to Santiago de Chile, lasting one week. The second edition received 2,252 entries, from which fifteen lunch ladies were awarded amounts paid in cash, and the first place, in addition to money, won international travel. The winning recipes, both from the first and second editions, gave rise to two FNDE publications.

This action promoted by the PNAE Coordination was a project focused on the lunch ladies. We believe that actions like this helped to give visibility to these professionals, being a way of valuing and recognizing their work. However, we need to question the scope of this action, that is, to verify if it improves the work of the school lunch ladies. For this, studies and research capable of specifically addressing the impact of these actions would be needed.

### **Super Lunch Ladies**

The reality show “*Super Lunch Ladies*” was a television program developed by the FNDE, with support from *Banco do Brasil*. It took place in 2018, showing competition between the ten winners of the first and second editions of the “Best School Feeding Recipes” contest (BRASILa, 2015; FNDE, 2017). The program was shown by the TV channel TV Escola and also on the YouTube channel, under the command of the actor Eri Johnson. There were thirteen episodes, and in each one, a professional left

the program and another won a prize worth one thousand reais, very similar to the various television products of culinary competition that fill the schedules of Brazilian TVs.

Actions such as contests and the reality show are important to give visibility to the work of lunch ladies and can help them to value their role. However, we believe that this type of action can also highlight her role as a cook. These actions focus on the preparation of tasty and healthy recipes, which is an extremely important role of the school lunch lady but they do not emphasize their role as an integral subject of the school as an educator. It is also necessary to evaluate the scope of this type of action, verifying if it arouses the interest of the lunch ladies and the people in general.

To understand the impact of this TV show on the lives of the lunch ladies, both participants, and non-participants, it is necessary to carry out studies and research with this focus. It is important to understand if there is still some impact not only on the lives of the lunch ladies but also on the eyes of those who can interfere with their work, improving their quality of life or strengthening their profession; besides questioning the reach of production of this nature on a channel with a very low audience, such as TV Escola.

What we can undoubtedly say is that, unlike the legal provisions analyzed so far, the use of identity is present, working with the way subjects produce their temporary identification with a group, in this case, the lunch ladies, and alluding to the production of their imaginary, as an important character in the school community, not only being lunch ladies but also super lunch ladies, in an evident production of a language of social empowerment (HALL, 2009; CASTORIADIS, 1982; BERTH, 2019).

### **Food and Nutrition Education Journey<sup>8</sup>**

Aiming to strengthen the FNE in the school environment and the inclusion of the theme in the teaching-learning process, the General Coordination of PNAE has implemented some initiatives that involve several subjects of the Program. One of the actions is the Food and Nutrition Education Journey, which has taken place annually since 2017. The program consists of the selection, dissemination, and publication of FNE actions carried out in public early childhood and elementary schools, encouraging debate and practice in the school environment and giving visibility to those actions already developed in public schools.

The FNE Journey raises the pedagogical purpose of drawing attention and debating, in a stimulating and creative way, the following themes: healthy eating, obesity prevention, and food culture. Each edition of the Journey took place throughout the school year, in stages, each with a different theme for the development of action.

At this time, we intend to bring an analysis of the theme “School lunch as a transforming agent of school meals”, which was worked on in 2019, in the third edition of the program. For each theme proposed in the program, some materials were available to the participants to support them in the planning and execution of an FNE activity. The PNAE Coordination team responsible for the program recorded videos with specialists on the topic, offering books, legislation, manuals, booklets, and any material that could support the participant.

Participants sent 520 reports with photos of FNE activities carried out by schools, with a focus on school lunch ladies. Five of them were selected to compose the publication Best Reports of Early Childhood Education, Elementary and Middle School - *Melhores Relatos da Educação Infantil e Ensino Fundamental I e II* (BRASIL, 2020b). The selected reports describe the activities carried out by the schools, such as presentation of ancestral recipes, reproduced by the lunch ladies and served in school meals; actions to get to know the lunch ladies, since “most of the students did not know their names, referring to them as the ‘lunch aunt’” (BRASIL, 2020a, p. 33); tributes to the lunch ladies, such as the preparation of snacks made by the students, recitation of poetry, delivery of thank-you letters and exhibition of posters highlighting the importance of these professionals. Playful games were also held between the lunch ladies and the students. Another report described interviews with the lunch ladies, and a book was made about the biography of one of them.

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to clarify that one of the authors of this article works directly in the planning and execution of the FNE Journey, following this project since the beginning of its implementation. So, the analysis of this item is permeated by the look of a person who is totally involved in this project.

After reading the reports, we verified that these activities value the lunch ladies, giving a prominent role to their performance both in the preparation of a healthy diet and in the role of educator. All activities involved the school community, with the participation of students' families, teachers, and the school's management, creating possibilities for the recognition and appreciation of the lunch lady. By placing this school professional as the protagonist of pedagogical activities, FNE's actions contributed to raising awareness and valuing her role as an educator, both for herself and other members of the school community.

Actions such as those proposed by the FNE Journey create powerful spaces for reflection on the role of school lunch ladies in public schools, which can contribute to the appreciation of these professionals. In a study carried out by Lourenção (2019), in Municipal Early Childhood Education Centers in the city of Lavras, Minas Gerais, the FNE Journey was used as one of the modules of the educational intervention to qualify directors, pedagogical coordinators, teachers, and general service assistants. He concluded that the proposed food and nutrition intervention program was effective in improving the educators' knowledge about food and nutrition.

For these actions to be effective, they must be proposed and worked on continuously by the FNDE, encouraging schools to participate and develop FNE activities with the entire school community. It is also necessary that there are initiatives that contribute to the adherence of a greater number of participating schools, strengthening the FNE in the school environment and contributing to the appreciation of the lunch ladies.

#### **Fourth cover of textbooks**

Since 2016, the covers of books distributed by the National Book and Teaching Material Program (PNLD- *Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático*) contain illustrations and messages that promote adequate and healthy eating. Seeking to arouse interest and generate reflection with the proposal of including FNE in schools, each fourth cover of each curricular component addresses a specific mobilizing theme. The intention is that each theme generates dialogues between the actors of the school community. In this way, we propose, in this item of the article, to verify if any theme related to the role of the lunch lady has already been worked on in any of these covers.

The illustrations and messages contained on the covers of textbooks distributed by the PNLDs, from 2016 to 2020, deal with various topics in food and nutrition education, ranging from a food culture, the food system, healthy eating habits to other issues involving human relationships and sustainability. When researching environmental issues intertwined with adequate and healthy food on the back covers of textbooks distributed by the PNLD 2018 - High School, Melgaço (2021) found that the topics covered on these covers provided spaces for reflections and discussions on Environmental Education and sustainability, such as relations of production, consumption and environmental crisis, gender identity, relations of belonging to nature and society, among others. For the author, the messages contained on the back covers of textbooks help to build a dialogic space between the themes that are fundamental for the education of schoolchildren, enabling a democratic and liberating education.

When analyzing the aspects that permeate the PNLD, Di Giorgi et al. (2014) placed the textbook as an important element in the formation and expansion of the cultural capital of the student and his family, in an extended way, especially for students who belong to the most disadvantaged strata of society and who may have impaired access to books. Furthermore, the authors consider that textbooks constitute an excellent teaching and pedagogical resource for teachers.

Greenwood and Fonseca (2016) describe how the FNE is constituted within the Basic Education textbook, visualizing spaces and paths that allow its optimization. The authors indicate that the spaces for the production and use of textbooks, such as government bodies, publishers, and public schools, potentially contribute so that public school students have access to FNE, and there must be dialogue and interaction so that FNE present in books is optimized. The books can offer questions that instigate the discussion about school feeding, facilitating and strengthening the educational process in food and nutrition, within the local school.

Considering the dimension of the PNLD and its importance for the formation of schoolchildren, the textbook can be an important instrument for the promotion of adequate and healthy

food and good habits of life. The space provided by the back covers to generate reflections on these themes has become an important tool for food and nutrition education.

This space can be strategic to work on the importance of the lunch lady for the PNAE, highlighting her strategic role as an educator. A cover containing a specific message about the lunch ladies has not yet been made. On the cover "It is nice to eat with friends at school", distributed through the PNLD 2019, for the early years of elementary school, there is the figure of two lunch ladies, one serving the children in the cafeteria and the other positioned inside the kitchen, watching. Although they appear in this illustration, the theme of the cover reflected the act of eating in company and did not have the role or importance of the lunch lady at school as its main theme.

The inclusion of the theme that involves the cook on the back cover of the textbook can be a good strategy to debate the importance of this professional for the PNAE, generating reflections on her role for and in the school community.

### **PNAE Monitoring Questionnaire**

The General Coordination of the National School Feeding Program (CGPAE- *Coordenação Geral do Programa Nacional de Alimentação Escolar*) of the FNDE has, in its organizational structure, specific coordination for monitoring and evaluating the Program. According to Resolution CD/FNDE nº 6/2020, the monitoring of the PNAE is permanent and aims to correct possible distortions, improve management and support its evaluation through data collection, analysis, and systematization of information and verification of execution. of the Program (BRASIL, 2020).

This coordination verifies the compliance of the execution of the PNAE in loco and at a distance through questionnaires, interviews, and observations, considering the current legislation and the following aspects: financial, family farming purchases, social control, and food and nutritional security (BRASIL, 2015). During the monitoring visit, a questionnaire is applied to the lunch ladies, consisting of thirteen questions, as described below.

CHART 4 – Description of the questions that make up the monitoring of the PNAE carried out by the FNDE

<b>QUESTIONS</b>
Do you have a career plan and compensation?
Do you consider that the working conditions (materials, furniture, equipment, environment, and organization) are adequate, that is, do they provide comfort, safety, and efficient performance?
Does the City Hall (or State Government) request periodic health check-ups?
Are Occupational Health Certificate(s) (ASO(s)) available at the school?
Do you think that the number of handlers is sufficient?
Do you follow the Best Practices Manual (BPM)?
Do you follow Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)?
Do you follow the Technical Preparation Sheets (TPSs)?
Do you use your hair(s) tied up and protected by net(s) and/or cap(s) as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?
Do you have a uniform(s) (gloves, apron(s), and closed boots or shoes) as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?
Do you wash your hands carefully, practicing antisepsis and other hygiene habits before and after handling?
Do you remove adornments (earrings, bracelets, rings, watches, necklaces, rings, or piercings)?
Do you receive periodic training in hygiene and health?

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data obtained from the FNDE's internal system.

These questions are related to the legislation that involves the execution of the PNAE and the norms that regulate the profession of food handlers. In this way, the questions want to verify if the following regulations are being complied with Opinion n° 9/2010 and Resolution n° 5/2010 of the National Council of Education/Chamber of Basic Education (CNE/CEB- *Conselho Nacional de Educação/Câmara de Educação Básica*), which establish the National Guidelines for the Career Plans and Remuneration of Public Basic Education Employees (BRASIL, 2010, 2010a); RDC ANVISA n° 216/2004 (BRASIL, 2004); Regulatory Norm NR 7 (Medical Exams) of the Occupational Health Medical Control Program, published by the Ministry of Labor Ordinance 3,214/1978 (BRASIL, 1978); Ordinance SVS/MS 326/1997, (“Documentation”) of Annex II of RDC ANVISA number 275/2002 (BRASIL, 1997, 2002); Resolution/CD/FNDE number 6/2020 (BRASIL, 2020).

Considering that adequate and healthy food is a fundamental human right (BRASIL, 1988), the PNAE seeks to guarantee food and nutritional security for students in schools. The guarantee of FNS for schoolchildren depends on a series of procedures that must be strictly followed throughout the process involving food handling. These procedures are described in a series of regulations and legislation, and it is up to the FNDE to be aware of and monitor compliance with these rules. The nutritional and hygienic-sanitary issues of school meals are intrinsically involved with the school lunch ladies, who must use adequate food preparation techniques, ensuring the health of schoolchildren. The execution of school meals must be evaluated and monitored by the PNAE/FNDE team, as well as by the Program's nutritionists and by the executing agencies.

We can observe concern about the hygienic-sanitary issues of school meals in the thirteen questions, aimed at the lunch ladies, which are included in the monitoring. However, there is no question directed to the role of the lunch lady as an educator. This may be an indication of the invisibility of this role of the school lunch ladies by the Program.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

From the analysis of PNAE documents and projects that involve the lunch ladies, we can see that the Program has a legal framework and space to strengthen and value this important professional who promotes healthy and adequate food in the school environment, but that, in many ways, reinforces the process of invisibility of the lunch ladies. For Recine (2017), food and nutrition education actions in the daily lives of schoolchildren have been fostered from PNAE initiatives, such as the Food and Nutrition Education Journey and messages on food and nutrition topics on the back covers of the textbooks distributed by the PNLD. However, the analysis of the school lunch ladies suggests that, although there seems to be a predisposition and willingness by the PNAE Coordination to recognize and value to the lunch ladies, actions are more focused on attempts to communicate with the group (reality shows, competitions) than for the inscription of these professionals in the official discourse, which is much less focused on representation and more on a certain common sense of representation.

The lunch ladies are represented in some actions, as in the contest “Best Recipes of School Feeding” and in the reality show “Super Lunch Ladies”. The presence of school lunch ladies in these projects may mean that their absence has been made up, but their presence remains problematic when in the official discourse, as they are sometimes left out, sometimes treated in a depersonalized way, and very far from the identity arrangement that socially situates them as a group, as the lunch ladies.

The option for the expressions “food handler”, in the cold treatment of legal provisions, and “lunch ladies”, when one intends to approach this professional, reveals, at the very least, a lack of knowledge by those who are preparing these documents, of the importance of seeing the lunch ladies as part of a group. On the other hand, other subjects of education, such as teachers, are not known in any other way, because, in the law and communication, they are treated in the same way.

The discussion on representation and representativeness can be taken into the PNAE. The absence of social subjects in the documents and projects of this Program must be criticized, especially when the context of these people is linked to the minority in representation, that is when a social group consists of women, black, and low-income. Despite this social stratum constituting a giant population group, in Brazil, it is a social minority in terms of representation.



The outsourcing process, with the extinction of the public position of the lunch lady, configures its devaluation (PINHO; MARTÍNEZ, 2016). The lunch ladies are identified, in the outsourced contracts, as food handlers, and the fact that they do not identify them as lunch ladies contributes to the growing decrease in the identity of these professionals with this position. The authors indicate that despite not being identified as “lunch ladies”, they are recognized by all other school agents, which is also presented in other studies used here as a reference.

Although the expression “food handler” sounds to some people a little more professional than “lunch lady”, it is important to remember that the definition of a food handler is restricted to a technical, operational, and hygienist function. The lunch lady is not just a cook or food handler, since her role goes beyond preparing meals. She is also an educator, forming a link between the student and the food. When serving meals, the lunch lady can encourage the student to eat and guide them in the formation of good eating habits. Thinking about the nomenclature of this professional leads us to reflect on the destined functions, or that influence, her doing at school and in the PNAE.

Representativeness plays a central role in the formation of identities and subjectivities. In this way, when the PNAE represents the lunch lady, in projects or documents, as a cook or as a food handler, excluding the plurality of her role as an educator, it reinforces her stereotype focused only on food preparation and cleaning of physical areas. This contributes to the social discredit and the consolidation of this professional's role as a subordinate subject. By reinforcing stereotypes and discrimination, the Program can make the knowledge of school lunch ladies invisible.

The presence of documents or actions that strengthen the role of the educator of the lunch lady can also contribute to the appreciation of this profession and the improvement of the living and working conditions of this professional. There is a concern about the practice of hygienic-sanitary control of the lunch lady as a food handler, but there are few actions that reinforce her role as an educator.

The PNAE has spaces that, if explored, can be powerful to generate reflection on the roles of school lunch ladies and the strengthening of food and nutrition education. Training or courses coordinated by the CECANEs, continuity of actions linked to the FNE Journey, insertion of messages and illustrations on the back covers of textbooks, preparation and dissemination of technical notes, insertion of the role of school lunch lady in the relevant legislation, evaluation and monitoring of this paper are some of these spaces that can contribute to the representation of the lunch ladies in the PNAE.

Incentives for the inclusion of topics on the promotion of healthy and adequate food, for inter and transdisciplinary work between teachers and other school employees, and the involvement of other PNAE subjects in the political pedagogical project of schools, in addition to the recognition of the role of the lunch lady as an educator are initiatives that can be awakened and propagated through PNAE actions.

We insist on drawing attention to the process of producing the subalternity of the lunch lady. We do this because we understand that this process is neither constituted nor disappears overnight. It is necessary to say, say it again, say it again and always, to be heard, otherwise, the language that naturalizes subalternity, that sees these women as part of the landscape of the school cafeteria, will never find the contradictory, the criticism, and will continue reproducing its excluding grammar that materializes in the exclusion of subjects. If even today we need to remind the members of this society that racism exists and that discrimination based on social class (HOOKS, 2000), classism, still needs to enter more strongly into the sociological debate, we can start by calling the women who work in the kitchens of schools by school lunch ladies, which is how they recognize themselves and are recognized by others.

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Mariana Belloni Melgaço is the author of the master's thesis that gave rise to this article. She reviewed this work. Rodrigo Matos-de-Souza is the supervisor of the master's degree. Both participated physically and intellectually in the writing of this manuscript.

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