

Teaching work in high school: the search for emancipation and the confrontation with performativity

O trabalho docente no ensino médio: a busca da emancipação e o confronto com a performatividade

Trabajo docente en la escuela secundaria: la búsqueda de la emancipación y el enfrentamiento de la performatividad

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ABSTRACT

We discuss how much the teacher's work can contribute to young people appropriating school knowledge and giving it a new meaning based on their future projects. As a methodological strategy, we carry out a dialogue with authors who discuss the importance of teachers establishing more dialogical relationships with their students and with researchers who address how Managerialism gives new meaning to the work of teachers. We conclude that the content worked in the classroom makes sense for students, as they can use it to face everyday challenges. We highlight that business rationality has intensified work and reduced democratic spaces in the school environment. Its confrontation presupposes that teachers assume that the school is at the service of people and not of capital.

Keywords: Emancipation. Teaching Work. Performativity.

RESUMO

Discutimos o quanto o trabalho do professor pode contribuir para as juventudes apropriarem-se do conhecimento escolar e o ressignificarem em função de seus projetos de futuro. Como estratégia metodológica, realizamos uma interlocução com autores que discutem a importância de os docentes estabelecerem relações mais dialogais com seus alunos e com pesquisadores que abordam como as políticas de gerencialismo ressignificam o trabalho dos professores. Concluímos que o conteúdo trabalhado em sala de aula tem sentido para os alunos, na medida em que eles podem operá-lo para o enfrentamento dos desafios cotidianos. Destacamos que a racionalidade empresarial tem intensificado o trabalho e reduz os espaços democráticos no ambiente escolar. Seu enfrentamento pressupõe que os professores assumam que a escola está a serviço das pessoas e não do capital.

Palavras-chave: Emancipação. Trabalho Docente. Performatividade.

RESUMEN

Discutimos en qué medida el trabajo del profesor puede contribuir a que los jóvenes se apropien del conocimiento escolar y lo resignifiquen en función de sus proyectos de futuro. Como estrategia

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metodológica realizamos un diálogo con autores que discuten la importancia de que los docentes establezcan relaciones más dialógicas con sus alumnos y con investigadores que abordan cómo el gerencialismo resignifica el trabajo de los profesores. Concluimos que el contenido trabajado en el aula tiene sentido para los alumnos en la medida en que pueden operarlo para enfrentar los desafíos cotidianos. Destacamos que la racionalidad empresarial ha intensificado el trabajo y reducido los espacios democráticos en el entorno escolar. Enfrentar esto supone que los profesores asuman que la escuela está al servicio de las personas y no del capital.

Palabras clave: Emancipación. Trabajo Docente. Performatividad.

INTRODUCTION

The high school curriculum reform, widely questioned for its authoritarian nature and the impoverishment of the education of young people attending public schools, was justified by the need to make this final stage of basic education more attractive and meaningful for these young people.

Little progress has been made in the debate over the reasons why young people lose their enthusiasm for school, if that feeling ever existed. The fact is that today's youth realize that, although completing high school is a minimum requirement for possible entry into the labor market, they no longer see, as previous generations did, that this completion can provide them with the much sought-after social mobility.

The high rates of youth unemployment, the scarcity of job opportunities, and the uncertainty about the future raise many doubts among young people regarding the true meaning of going to school.

In any case, this uncertainty has not led to a devaluation of the importance of school. Much of the positive feeling students have toward school is shaped by the work of teachers, especially those they identify as the best educators. This positivity is enhanced as teachers establish relationships with their students characterized by respect, welcoming, care, horizontality, and other similar actions.

The more the student is recognized as a subject with a life story, the more the teacher is motivated to ensure that students learn, and the more the teacher explicitly demonstrates the importance of the school and what they teach to the students, the more the school gains meaning, and the more the content taught in the classroom is reinterpreted and given new significance by these students.

On the other hand, the teaching work is being realized in a scenario where teachers are increasingly held accountable for results. The good teacher is the one whose practices lead students to achieve good performance on large-scale exams.

We live in a context where the pursuit of students' comprehensive education is deemphasized in favor of effective training aimed at achieving good performance on large-scale exams. The role of the teacher as an intellectual is diminished, and the performative teacher is exalted.

The good teacher produces measurable results. The critical, questioning, and reflective teacher has no place in a school that solely aims for results. Management practices and the pursuit of outcomes inhibit the role of the teacher as an intellectual agent. The focus is on an efficient, competent, and effective teacher.

To educate for emancipation or to educate for performativity? This is the teacher's dilemma.

In this sense, this text aims to discuss the importance of the teacher as an intellectual agent who should assume that their work is directly related to the pursuit of a more meaningful school for

youth, not in terms of achieving results, but from the perspective of the comprehensive development of young people, being an agent capable of contributing to these youths appropriating school knowledge, reinterpreting the learned content, and developing strategies to face the challenges they encounter in their daily lives and in constructing their future plans.

To achieve the objectives of this work, we engaged with authors who discuss the importance of teachers establishing more horizontal and dialogic relationships with their students, aiming to make their work meaningful for these learners. We also sought to dialogue with authors who examine management policies and performativity, and how they reconfigure teachers' work, structuring as technologies that diminish the role of these educators as intellectual agents, from the perspective of forming youth for their political emancipation.

TEACHERS WHO MAKE THE SCHOOL MEANINGFUL FOR THE STUDENTS

Mesquita (2020), by presenting the results of a study conducted with high school students at a public school in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, highlighted that students' recognition of teachers' "competence" is summarized in short phrases indicating whether the teachers are satisfactorily fulfilling their roles or not. But beyond that, they also suggest that students evaluate themselves by positioning themselves as the center of the teaching-learning process.

These students, like those interviewed by Cunha (1989), when they say that being a good teacher means knowing how to teach, make this claim based on the view that a model of teaching practice that ignores the students' thoughts and lived experiences is no longer acceptable.

The studies by Cunha (1989) and Mesquita (2020), although conducted in different periods, show that students, when listing as criteria for evaluating a good teacher the importance of delivering dynamic, enjoyable lessons, teaching through play, offering varied classes, promoting interesting lessons, conducting interactive sessions, and encouraging dialogue and debate, are signaling to teachers that schools and educators can no longer ignore the fact that young people entering school want to be protagonists in the learning process. They want to engage in dialogue with the school and want the content they learn to make sense in their lives.

According to the research findings (Mesquita, 2020), the main difficulties teachers report in carrying out their work are related to students' lack of interest in the content taught in class. They emphasize that student indiscipline is not directly related to disrespect for classroom rules or to violent behavior. The teachers' feeling that their authority is being questioned, or their sense that students devalue their work and the school itself, is directly linked to the meaning students assign to the content taught and to schooling as a whole. However, those regarded as better teachers do not report facing such difficulties to the same extent as other teachers.

From François Dubet's interview¹ (Peralva and Sposito, 1997), we can infer that students' disciplinary misbehavior can, in some cases, be explained by a teacher's lack of a clearer stance in confronting students' disrespect for rules and failure to fulfill obligations that help ensure good learning; but it can also be explained by the absence of more horizontal (less hierarchical) practices by teachers in their interactions with students. In other words, respect for the teacher's authority and, consequently, the appreciation of classroom time for its better use, are built on the value students believe their teacher holds in both political and affective dimensions. In other words, discipline or indiscipline also constitutes a political response that students give to the teacher and to the school.

1 Interview granted to Angelina Teixeira Peralva and Marília Pontes Sposito, published in the *Revista Brasileira de Educação* (RBE), in which the author discusses his experience as a history and geography teacher at a school in the outskirts of Bordeaux, France. According to the RBE, authorship of the article should be attributed to Peralva and Sposito (1997). However, we will follow the more common practice of referring to the interviewee.

As highlighted by Paulo Freire (1996), it is important for teachers to be clear that their authority is not achieved through authoritarian practices, but fundamentally through the relationship they establish with their students. For him, both parties must be aware of the distinct roles and functions that structure this relationship. The teacher's authority and the role of the educator as the facilitator of the teaching-learning process do not require forsaking discipline, nor can they be structured on a false freedom granted to the student.

Pedagogical work requires planning, organization, setting objectives, and assessment, but none of these actions should be guided by student silencing or by disregarding the importance of the student in the development and reworking of the teacher's work.

Even if the teacher sets the direction of the teaching process, the student cannot be treated as an object, as a passive being who has no history, no life of their own, no voice, experiences, or desires. Although the teaching-learning process aims to shape the one who is in the role of learner, this does not mean that the one in the role of teacher cannot also learn and reevaluate their practices, their way of seeing the world, and their work, based on the dialogue with the person they are about to teach.

Therefore, I add, those who have something to say must assume the duty to motivate and challenge those who listen, so that the listener is encouraged to speak, *respond*, and engage. It is intolerable for the authoritarian educator to assume the self-claimed right to behave as the owner of the truth, claiming it and using the time to discourse about it. For this educator, the listener does not even have their own time, because the time of the listener belongs to the educator — it's their speaking time. Their speech, therefore, takes place in a *silenced* space, not in a space *with* or *in* silence. Conversely, the space of the democratic educator, who learns to speak by listening, is "cut" by the intermittent silence of those who, speaking, pause to listen to the one who, *silent* but not *silenced*, speaks (Freire, 1996, p. 84).

Disciplinary misbehavior is structured based on the peculiarities of each individual, the timing of youth, and the sense of collective belonging that students have regarding themselves as a youth group which, at first, is in conflict with the organizational norms and values that the school promotes.

We understand that much of these responses relate to the meaning that students attribute to their school experience and to the school knowledge. Therefore, in practice, the teacher who aims for their work to produce better results regarding student learning faces, daily, the challenge of gaining trust, of seduction, of building practices that foster a sense of belonging and appreciation for the school by the students, which effectively involves recognition, valuation, and dialogue with the students' knowledge.

The teacher's challenge is always in this movement, according to Dubet (*apud* Peralva and Sposito, 1997), of also turning young people/teenagers into students. For him, it is important that the school and its professionals recognize that those who enter the school walls today are new social subjects, who have different representations and expectations regarding the school compared to the older youth groups that attended classrooms and, for the most part, had their expectations fulfilled based on their social class background.

As highlighted Dubet (*apud* Peralta and Sposito, 1997, p. 227) in a context of employment crisis, "students no longer believe that diplomas will allow them to leave their social origins; many students have the impression that school is useless

It is therefore necessary for the school to undergo a restructuring so that students find meaning in the experiences and learning opportunities it aims to provide. We agree with Reis (2012, p. 650), who states that, in order for "school knowledge to be the target of a young person's investment, it must resonate with the very questions that the individuals are trying to understand."

It is necessary for the school to demonstrate itself as a promoter of useful learning. Therefore, as Dubet (*apud* Peralva and Sposito, 1997) highlights, what matters is not the number of things students learn, but that they do learn. However, as Charlot (1996) pointed out, students will only have motivation and interest in learning if they engage with these contents, if these truly make sense for their lives.

When we emphasize the importance that the knowledge taught in school make sense to students, we are not trying to establish a relationship of student determination regarding what the school should include in its curriculum. Taking such a position would be an inversion in the process of forming children, adolescents, and young people. Students do not go to school to deepen the knowledge they have already acquired through their life trajectories. Through schooling, they seek to acquire knowledge that broadens their possibilities for greater engagement and dialogue with the world.

The knowledge provided through schooling can help these individuals see and experience the world in a different way and become capable of reflecting on their experiences, reinterpreting them, and giving them new meanings, in the sense of becoming the protagonists of their lives. In this way, they will become organizers of concrete practices for building their future projects and developing a societal plan that is attentive to their individual interests as well as those of the groups and classes to which they are connected.

For the student, however, finding meaning in schooling is not the same as being the sole promoter of their own educational process. It means recognizing that the school offers and provides experiences and knowledge that make a difference in their life. The feelings of satisfaction, belonging, being welcome, and valued at school may be the main conditions for the student to develop a relationship characterized by commitment, integration, and belonging, rather than an instrumental relationship, perceiving the school merely as a passing ritual towards a future that is increasingly unpredictable and insecure.

While, on one hand, feeling valued by the school is directly related to the care that the teacher provides to the student, both in terms of affection and in recognizing the student as a social subject. The feeling of being valued is also connected to personal concerns, to the student's current state as a young person.

The school gains or loses meaning for students based on how they evaluate its contribution to helping them face the various challenges in their lives. It would be an exaggeration to expect the school to provide answers to questions that are not directly related to its designated social function, which is fundamentally to ensure the learning of the historically developed content (Saviani, 1985). However, when we talk about the school's meaning for students, we believe that the content, in some way, helps them confront the challenges they face in life. It is possible to believe that feelings of belonging to the school and valuing this knowledge become greater as students believe they can connect it to their lives, reconfigure or redefine their practices, better understand themselves, or reassess their future plans.

It is in this sense that we agree with Michael Young (2007), who affirms that the school has the role of providing students with knowledge that is powerful, especially for those from working-class backgrounds, in contributing to broaden their worldview, engaging in dialogue beyond the borders that exclude and inhibit them, and fostering their overall development as subjects of rights.

For Young (2007), although the school is not the only place where children and young people can acquire knowledge, it is the one that can facilitate the appropriation of knowledge that individuals cannot obtain at home. It is this powerful knowledge that justifies parents and students seeking the school. Ensuring that the school can promote an internal dynamic so that students do not become

frustrated is one of the main challenges of educational policies that aim to make the school a space recognized by youth and that makes sense in their lives.

The school needs to reinvent itself to become a space that contributes to students reworking, throughout their lives, the knowledge acquired there and, from that reworking, producing new knowledge that helps reframe their lives and also enables them to develop effective practices as subjects of rights and protagonists in the construction of their future projects and their lives within a collective scope.

To claim powerful knowledge (Young, 2007), although this is not guaranteed to bring about a change in the life conditions of young people — after all, their present and future are not defined solely by schooling —, is one of the conditions for young people to broaden their worldview and actively act as subjects of protagonism. To ensure knowledge from the perspective of this intent, the school must establish itself as a genuinely democratic space that is attentive to the interests of young people from the working class.

THE GOOD TEACHER WITHIN THE SCOPE OF MANAGERIALISM AND THE VALORIZATION OF PERFORMATIVITY

The current policies for basic education, particularly the recent high school reform, are configured as limiters of access to powerful knowledge (Young, 2007). Curricular fragmentation, the suppression of subjects, and the false idea that young people can establish their own learning pathways are, in practice, forms of limiting access to knowledge, promoting for poorer youth a formation that is restricted to the minimally necessary for their intervention in society as second- or third-class citizens.

Following the reform, an attempt is made to create the consensus that, because the school ensures what is considered basic knowledge, it is guaranteeing the necessary knowledge. Basic for what? For whom? The answer is provided by Freitas (2012) when she states that, once again, the elites establish that, for the poorer sectors, the basic is directly related to their condition of poverty; that is, impoverished knowledge, leading to poor citizenship.

On the other hand, within a logic in which the school increasingly succumbs to the valorization of results, basic learning tends to be limited to what can be measured in large-scale exams. Therefore, it becomes important to discuss what is considered basic, taking into account for whom these basic learnings are directed; why some knowledge is regarded as basic (and other knowledge is not); and what determines the understanding and the selection of these knowledge areas considered as basic.

The argument that the basics are good because they must come first is tautological, meaning it leads us to believe that “the basics are good because they are the basics.” The effect is that, from this stereotype, we no longer think critically. With this common-sense logic, the objectives of “good education” are defined. But the basics exclude what is not considered basic; that is the issue. The problem is not what it contains as “basic,” but what it excludes without saying, simply by being labeled as “basic.” This is the “curricular narrowing” produced by “standards” centered on reading and math. They leave out the good education, which will always be more than just the basics (Freitas, 2012, p. 390).

These are policies that, through the impoverishment of the school, increasingly minimize students’ formation, reducing it to what they learn from their external experiences outside of school. In other words, these are policies that diminish the meaning of school for these young people, as they aim to inhibit the role of public education in the formation of intellectuals. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the defense of public schools as fundamental spaces in the process of emancipation of the children of the working class. This is because, as Michael Young (2007, p. 1297) emphasized,

For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, active participation in school may be the only opportunity to acquire powerful knowledge and to be able, at least intellectually, to move beyond their local and personal circumstances. There is no benefit for students in building a curriculum based solely on their experience so that curriculum can be validated and, as a result, leave them always in the same condition.

This commitment of the school, its teachers, and managers to ensure the appropriation of powerful knowledge cannot be discussed without considering the rationality that underpins the school's pedagogical work. Here, we understand pedagogical rationality, based on Giroux (1997), as that which is constituted with the aim of safeguarding the interests that define and shape the work of these professionals in their daily school activities, even if those interests are not their own. On the other hand, as the author emphasizes, all rationality should be viewed not only in terms of the issues raised, articulated, and valued but also in terms of those that are ignored.

What is said, as well as what is forgotten, expresses the rationality that guides pedagogical work. Therefore, in a context where the school submits to a logic of forming productive subjects and is emptied of the possibilities of developing more critical mindsets and emancipated subjects, the hegemonic rationality tends to diminish the teacher's autonomy and their role as the structurer and manager of the educational process.

The school succumbs to economic and managerial rationality, which ultimately values knowledge and practices that can effectively contribute to strengthening productivity. Within a logic of holding teachers accountable for the results their students achieve in large-scale exams, the emphasis is placed on measurable learning, and the outcome of this measurement is used as an instrument for punishing or rewarding teachers.

The control that the State exerts over the teacher's work is seemingly nonexistent; however, it is important to highlight that the logic of performativity, the almost synonymous link between quality and performance, allows the State to exercise forms of control without the need to establish mechanisms that explicitly reveal its actions.

Performativity and its direct relationship with policies that link recognition, as well as bonuses or punishments for education workers, to the performance of schools in large-scale exams (accountability), highlight, on one hand, how standardization has become the reference for analyzing the quality of schools and teaching work. On the other hand, in light of the consensus being built around the idea that schools and teachers need to show results and achieve satisfactory performance when their work is evaluated, state intervention is not seen as intrusion nor control, but rather as a way to ensure that the school and its professionals produce what society desires. In other words, performativity and accountability policies are not viewed as intrusions into the teaching work or school dynamics; they are technologies that enable society to have feedback on how the resources allocated for maintaining public education are being used.

Performativity plays a crucial role within this set of policies. It operates in various ways to "tie things together" and rework them. It facilitates the monitoring role of the State, "governing at a distance" — "governing without government." It allows the State to deeply penetrate the cultures, practices, and subjectivities of public sector institutions and their workers, without seeming to do so. It (performativity) changes what it "indicates," shifts meanings, produces new profiles, and ensures "alignment." It objectifies and commodifies the work of the public sector, and the knowledge-work of educational institutions is transformed into "results," "performance levels," and "quality measures." The discourses around accountability, improvement, quality, and efficiency that surround and accompany these objectifications make existing practices fragile and indefensible — change becomes inevitable and irresistible, especially when incentives are linked to performance measures (Ball, 2004, p. 1116).

Neoliberal rationality redefines the role of the school and subjugates it to the logic of results, emptying the teacher of their role as the primary mediator in ensuring that students from working-class backgrounds gain access to powerful knowledge. In other words, control over teachers' work is also the school's control over the formation of students.

As educational policies and schools succumbed to the logic of results and productivity, the innovations produced within schools are no longer conceived as attempts at change or transformation. Instead, they become mechanisms aimed solely at ensuring a better dynamic for the ongoing "innovations." They seek to perfect the existing rationality.

As Veiga (2003) pointed out, the innovations that have been established as regulatory are structured around a technical and instrumental rationality aimed solely at ensuring the school has better *performance*. This rationality "does not produce a new pedagogical project; it produces the same system, modified" (Veiga, 2003, p. 270).

It does not have, as one of its hallmarks, the ability to listen to the subjects. The "changes" are objectified in a dynamic where that which is external to the school is positioned as the center of control, intelligence, and the determinant of the transformations to be implemented within it.

Capital seeks to maintain ideological control over the school. It advocates, through business entities linked to the third sector, mechanisms to expand school attendance and increase literacy rates, but it does not give up political and ideological dominance over the school. Business representatives present themselves as those who have the solution to the problems affecting schools. In other words, they see themselves as able to find the remedy for the crisis impacting education. As Apple (2002, p. 68) also pointed out, "this regime of control is based not on trust but on a deep suspicion of teachers' motives and competence."

For the business reformers, the State has shown itself to be incompetent or incapable of addressing the education crisis, if not directly responsible for its existence (Gentili, 1996).

They consider that teachers and education professionals are also responsible for this crisis. Hence, they seek mechanisms to diminish teachers' action and to establish strategies for their demoralization before parents and society in general (Gentili, 1996; Freitas, 2014).

The individuals who experience the school's daily life are disregarded and seen as undeserving of attention. They are considered to lack the capacity to propose ideas or to think differently.

Thus, when projects are built based on regulatory innovations, they tend to have a characteristic marked by a normative, authoritative, and fragmented approach, which is disengaged from the subject agents of the practical process and reduces them to mere rule enforcers. The detachment from reality allows formulators to avoid existing social conflicts at the local level and, on the other hand, implies ignoring possibilities that could be achieved through joint, dialogical construction with the implementers, capable of enriching the process and, consequently, its outcomes (Silva and Martins, 2020, p. 7).

In this sense, it is always important to remember that the new forms of educational management, structured from a managerial and business-oriented perspective, have a specific goal to achieve, and this goal does not align with making the school a space for the full development of the individual, nor does it aim to guarantee the wholeness of students' education. Therefore, it does not promote democratic practices but, on the contrary, strengthens authoritarian practices and shows contempt for divergent thinking.

Silencing potential divergences is the strategy of a school planning practice that relies on conservatism and rejection, aiming to avoid analyzing the reality of public education in its entirety.

The fragment is privileged. Solutions are sought for parts of the problem, in a way that does not aim to change, but to create the illusion of transformation. Its supposed innovative character reinforces the relations of domination embedded within the school (Veiga, 2003).

Corporate rationality, which has intensified the work of teachers by subordinating pedagogy to the logic of results, is committed to the project of shaping the productive citizen (Frigotto and Ciavatta, 2006). It is less committed to expanding democratic spaces within the school environment and has little intention of fostering ethically solidaristic subjects. This rationality does not aim to end practices of neglect and disrespect towards students' life histories and trajectories. Therefore, we agree with Veiga (2003), who asserts that schools do not demand just innovations; they demand ruptures. This rupture concerns the definition of whom the school is directing its intentionality towards, whether the capital or the people.

THE INTELLECTUAL AND EMANCIPATORY TEACHER BREAKING WITH THE LOGIC OF PERFORMATIVITY

When we emphasize the teacher's role as an intellectual agent in the students' developmental process, acting as a distributor and disseminator of culture (Mellouki and Gauthier, 2004), we are advocating that teachers' actions should have the intentional goal of ensuring learners' comprehensive development. From this perspective, the content taught in the classroom is not an end in itself. It should be seen as objects to be engaged with by students, articulated with their concrete reality, so that they function as tools in the service of emancipation, autonomy, and youthful protagonism.

The teacher's action, even though it materializes through strategies that can be considered to have a technical dimension, learned throughout their professional life and more specifically from the moment of initial training, is fundamentally political and intellectual. It must aim to guide the student's formative process. It expresses care for those with whom the teacher interacts daily, with whom a relationship of complicity and hope for a better future is established.

Although, for some, there is an understanding that the role of intellectuals is reserved to individuals whose background is more closely related to fields of knowledge characterized by erudition, in-depth theoretical work, and reflection — which might lead them to believe that disciplines such as sociology, history, and philosophy are those where teachers have the opportunity to influence and contribute to students using knowledge to reflect on its relevance in addressing the issues present in their lives —, it is important to highlight that acting as an intellectual is defined by the teacher's intentionality and not by their disciplinary field.

It is the tasks and commitments that teachers undertake for themselves and for the school that lead them to act as intellectuals in organizing and guiding the formation of students. Taking on the commitment to ensure access to disciplinary knowledge and culture, more broadly, by establishing strategies for students to reflect and rethink their way of living and the events occurring in the world, is what makes a teacher an intellectual (Mellouki and Gauthier, 2004).

For this, it is the responsibility of all teachers, regardless of their disciplinary field, to

[Acclimate] young people to the human cultural work, raising their awareness about the hidden dimensions of culture (prejudices, stereotypes, national, tribal, religious, and sexual identities), and the phenomena of inclusion and exclusion triggered by these are some guidelines that could be at the core of the mission — stimulating their interest in the historical context of cultural productions and helping them develop their critical sense and responsibility as cultural beings (Mellouki and Gauthier, 2004, p. 562).

Although we understand that initial and ongoing teacher training is important in constructing knowledge that enables implementing techniques aimed at materializing a pedagogical intent, the learning related to caring for others is what determines the interest in establishing strategies to ensure the appropriation of new knowledge that can also contribute to students acting as intellectuals, as leaders, in the sense of Gramscian thought.

According to Mellouki and Gauthier (2004), it is only the teacher who institutionally holds the symbolic power to shape the behaviors and attitudes of children, adolescents, and young people throughout their school journey.

Among all intellectuals, the teacher is the only one who has direct access to children and can act immediately upon them with the purpose of guiding their intelligence and personality toward a specific educational and social ideal. They are the only ones with the right to systematically transform beings who are intellectually and psychologically vulnerable, whereas journalists, philosophers, militants, artists, novelists, or politicians generally act indirectly, dealing with adults who are already formed and equipped with the intellectual and psychological means to defend themselves, analyze, criticize, choose, accept, or reject others' opinions. Unlike these intellectuals, who often act voluntarily, more or less sporadically, and without the obligation to produce results, the teacher operates daily within culture and, through planned strategies and methodical actions, *must improve the children under their responsibility: making them more "cognizant," at peace with themselves and others, equipped with the knowledge and qualities necessary for professional activity and social integration.* Therefore, in accordance with the mission currently assigned to schools, they must influence all dimensions of the child's personality to make them an educated, socialized, and competent individual for life in society and work (Mellouki and Gauthier, 2004, p. 566).

Through their pedagogical work, the teacher guides students to ensure that, based on the content learned, they can read and reread their actions and confront or adapt themselves to the standards established by the school and by society. The teacher's role as a mediator of learning can have a function that might reinforce practices of subjugation and control, but it can also contribute to questioning and critique.

The practices that students will have to confront or reproduce mechanisms of inequality, although not solely a reflection of the teacher's work, are closely linked to the teacher's intentionality, methods, and strategies as the organizer and intellectual agent in shaping their students' formation.

Through their intellectual work, the teacher either supports or opposes practices of domination. Therefore, envisioning the construction of a new hegemony involves recognizing the teacher's intellectual work with their students and, more broadly, the role of the school and everything connected to it.

Although the importance attributed by parents, students, and society in general to good performance on large-scale exams cannot be disregarded (recognizing, in fact, that some of these exams serve as filtering mechanisms for continuing studies at higher education levels), it is not appropriate to subsume the evaluation of a teacher's work solely to their students' performance on these exams. In this regard, Mesquita (2018) highlighted that, according to Antônio Nóvoa, the debate about teachers' work should not be based on assessing whether they are or are not competent; the main focus should be on identifying elements that can contribute to analyzing how this work is structured. The Portuguese researcher notes that, beyond knowledge, professional culture, pedagogical tact, and willingness to work as a team, teachers must also demonstrate a commitment

to social issues. Such concern with the personal and professional dimensions of teachers can help us better evaluate and propose policies for professional valuation, which should prioritize ongoing training with the aim of improving the quality of teaching work.

Having this concern with teaching practice, in the sense of understanding and examining the processual nature of their work, and how the teacher actively performs their profession, in order to then develop assessment proposals for their work, challenges the logic that sees the teacher merely as a resource in the students' learning process.

Although the importance of content mastery by the teacher, their ability to provide strategies that promote the appropriation of historically produced knowledge, the significance of adopting technological artifacts that enable innovative practices, and their capacity to manage classroom work, etc., are not to be disregarded, being a good teacher is not limited to effectiveness, quantification, or ranking — traits characteristic of the hegemonic neoliberal policies in Brazilian society and reinforced by business groups and international funding agencies, which tie education to the market and view the school almost exclusively as a trainer of human capital.

Thus, it is evident that the studies presented on effective teachers and teaching performance distinguish themselves in two logics: one based on large-scale quantitative research conducted by international networks with standardized tests and an emphasis on bonus policies; and another rooted in more sociological analyses of teachers' work, incorporating elements of their professional culture and identity, with a focus on the development of the profession itself (Mesquita, 2018, p. 215).

Furthermore, it is important to assume that some indicators, including the System of Evaluation of Basic Education (SAEB), do not accurately reflect the learning achievements of students, and that poor or good performance becomes the teachers' responsibility.

On the other hand, based on Mesquita (2018), we must remember that there are various factors influencing students' learning, just as there are many elements that interfere in the execution and quality of the teacher's work.

It is possible to identify a list of intrinsic and extrinsic factors conducive to good performance in the profession. Among the intrinsic factors, the most prominent is the relationship with students, first and foremost, followed by relationships with administrators and colleagues. Among the extrinsic factors, salaries, working conditions, and public recognition stand out. An increased workload, the loss of professional autonomy, and student indiscipline are identified as unfavorable factors (Mesquita, 2018, p. 515).

Specifically regarding the possibility of teachers developing their work autonomously, we highlight the questions raised by Mello, Cirilo, and Pinto (2016) about this autonomy, since what we have observed is that current educational policies subordinate teachers' work to large-scale assessments and the achievement of good results that serve to rank schools and education networks.

In them, the discourse defending teacher autonomy is false, because what has materialized in public education networks is a movement of control over the teachers' work. This control is not fortuitous, but results from what is sought as a formation project.

Such educational policies establish mechanisms to control the teachers' work, which ultimately infringes upon their autonomy. This is directly related to a perspective on training that submits the formation of individuals to an adapted and responsive approach to the competitive and meritocratic logic imposed by educational reforms.

In this sense, we can say, as Shiroma and Evangelista (2015) highlight that attacking teacher autonomy means also attacking a training project aimed at developing critical, participative individuals who are not submissive to the logic of capital.

The new public management (NPM) seeks a type of quality that has been nothing more than the best performance of students in large-scale exams. This perspective is characterized by holding teachers responsible for students' performance and, consequently, blaming them for the poor performance of schools and of the education network to which they are linked.

We are, therefore, far from the ideal of professional autonomy. Instead, all these controls suggest the existence of a breakdown in the trust that once existed between teachers and the state during the era of duty. At the same time, it is observed that teachers are often portrayed by advocates of the NPM as workers who resist change, bound to their old routines and habits, who have difficulty following new educational trends, adopting new pedagogical approaches, and questioning their traditional practices. In short, the implementation of NPM is accompanied by a process of blaming teachers, to whom the failure of reforms or students' poor performance is often attributed. If students fail, it is due to teachers' inefficacy, insufficient performance, or because they do not employ the "best practices" enough (Tardif, 2013, p. 566).

Such a movement encourages competitiveness among teachers, making them increasingly individualistic in carrying out their work, thereby undermining the essential practice of collective effort within the school.

It can be inferred that the new logic attributed to teaching work, focused on performance and educational results, has diminished teachers' capacity for reflection on their professional and pedagogical practice, as well as their ability to engage in collective work. In this way, it is observed that educational changes have significantly contributed to the fragility of teacher autonomy. Therefore, it can also be inferred that the discourse on teacher autonomy is realized in a very different way in teachers' everyday lives. It is perceived as an autonomy controlled by mechanisms external to the school, with a focus on results [...], as teachers internalize new educational values — productivity and managerial rationality — leading to new forms of relationships with educational work, often emphasizing individuality and competitiveness, which can have implications for teachers' health (Mello, Cirilo and Pinto, 2016, p. 115).

Such pressures on teachers, in addition to constituting concrete actions that attack their autonomy and reinforce a formative logic that diverges from an education perspective aimed at emancipation, have also placed educators in a situation of emotional stress, which ultimately increases the risk of health problems for these professionals (Gasparini, Barreto and Assunção, 2005) and contributes to their discomfort in continuing to be teachers.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Valentim and Daibem (1999), among the dimensions to be considered in the evaluation of a teacher's work is their political competence, understood as the expression of the educator's commitment to ensuring that all individuals have their citizenship rights guaranteed.

The teacher's commitment to building a more just society relates to the development of pedagogical work aimed at making individuals more critical and committed to changing the reality in which they live. We understand that encouraging students' participation in the classroom, turning

them into subjects who also shape the teaching-learning process, constitutes an interpersonal competence that is acquired throughout their professional trajectory but is only effectively put into practice through the political commitment to make young people autonomous subjects and protagonists of their own learning process.

It means confronting a training project that disregards the different trajectories that students have, which are decisive for their learning process. It is a work that, by recognizing the other as an equal, seeks to put an end to any form of subjugation that the school has imposed on youth, which manifests as a concrete practice of maintaining various forms of inequality, whether related to class, race, gender, etc. However, exercising political and interpersonal competencies does not dispense with the technical-theoretical competence, as all of them, when articulated, contribute to ensuring the learning necessary for the solidification of students' autonomy.

Learning is an act of seeking and interacting. Ensuring that students are protagonists in their learning process requires that the school be recognized by the students as a space that provides experiences contributing to them becoming better than they are, so that their passage through schooling becomes an additional element in their pursuit of realizing their aspirations, desires, and future projects.

The content worked on by the teacher in the classroom or in other activities they provide to students makes sense to the students as they are able to operate it when facing the challenges they encounter daily. This does not necessarily occur immediately, but the teacher's role as a mediator of learning is essential for the appropriation and operationalization of acquired knowledge.

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