

## **Experiences, perceptions and expectations of students in managerial school of Educational network of São Paulo <sup>1 2 3 4</sup>**

### ***Experiências, percepções e expectativas de estudantes na escola gerencialista da rede estadual paulista***

### ***Experiencias, percepciones y expectativas de estudiantes en la escuela gerencialista de la red estatal de São Paulo***

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the students' experience in relation to schools occupancy movements in 2015 and their perceptions and opinions on educational policy of the State of São Paulo from 1995 to 2018. We conducted a documentary and bibliographic research on São Paulo's educational policy and interviews with former high school students who participated in schools occupancy. The concept of "experience" is used for the analysis of empirical material and the notion of New Public Management (NPM) under the influence of neoliberalism is used to understand educational policy. We verified that students, based on their experiences, formulated criticisms and expectations regarding the programs and projects of the São Paulo State Secretariat of Education (SEE-SP). They are criticisms that defend a universal, plural and democratic school as opposed to managerialism and the New Public Management.

**Keywords:** educational policy, managerialism, new public management, public school, students

## Resumo

*Neste artigo, analisamos a experiência dos estudantes nas ocupações de escolas no ano de 2015 e suas percepções e opiniões sobre a política educacional do estado de São Paulo no período de 1995 a 2018. Realizamos estudo documental e bibliográfico sobre a política educacional paulista e entrevistas com ex-estudantes da rede estadual de ensino, que participaram das ocupações de escola. Adotamos como referenciais para nossas análises o conceito de experiência na compreensão do material empírico e a influência da Nova Gestão Pública (NGP) sob o neoliberalismo para compreender a política educacional. Verificamos que em suas vivências, os(as) estudantes formularam críticas e expectativas a respeito dos programas e projetos da Secretaria Estadual da Educação de São Paulo (SEE-SP), contrapondo-se ao gerencialismo e à NGP ao defender uma escola universal, plural e democrática.*

**Palavras-chave:** política educacional, gerencialismo, nova gestão pública, escola pública, estudantes

## Resumen

*Neste artículo analizamos la experiencia de los estudiantes en relación a las ocupaciones escolares en 2015 y sus percepciones y opiniones sobre la política educativa del Estado de Sao Paulo de 1995 a 2018. Realizamos un estudio documental y bibliográfico sobre la política educativa de Sao Paulo, y entrevistas con ex alumnos del sistema escolar estatal que participaron en ocupaciones escolares. Adoptamos como referencias para nuestros análisis el concepto de experiencia en la comprensión del material empírico y la influencia de la Nueva Gestión Pública (NGP) bajo el neoliberalismo para comprender la política educativa. Verificamos que en sus vivencias, los/las estudiantes formularon críticas y expectativas a respecto de los programas y proyectos de la Secretaría de Educación del Estado de Sao Paulo (SEE-SP), oponiéndose al gerencialismo y a la Nueva Gestión Pública al defender una escuela universal, plural y democrática*

**Palabras clave:** política educative, gerencialismo, nueva gestión pública, escuela pública, estudiantes

## Introduction

This text analyzes the public school students' experiences in São Paulo state network public school. We dialogued with their experiences outside the school environment and rely on the literature about the meanings of school for young people who study in public basic education institutions.

We start from Lima's contributions on the configuration of school relations and the corrosion of the educational process with the deepening of New Public Management (NPM) and managerialism in education, and approach the conception of neoliberal rationality Dardot and Laval (2016). In order to analyze the student experience in state schools, we used the concept of experience developed by Thompson (1987), who considers it an element of mediation, part of the subaltern classes' awareness and fight formation processes. It is about people's experiences in the different aspects of social life that are inseparable from social, political, and cultural relations.

Investigating what students think about their experiences in public school allows us to access the effects of educational policies on these young people, whose basic training was in a school guided by managerialism.

Therefore, we seek to understand how the educational programs and projects implemented in São Paulo state network, between 1995 and 2018, were experienced by high school students and what opinion they had about the school regarding education quality and educational processes. The politics time is different from that of the students' experience, leading us to point out the main axes of the first in the period that begins in 1995 and the students' experience in 2015, considering the different school trajectories of our interviewees. Several programs implemented since 1995 have had their development modified and/or intensified in practice, depending on how the principles of managerialism take root and/or encounter resistance, both in the network and in each school unit. For this reason, we chose a set of elements of certain policies that were experienced by students in 2015, even if they started much earlier, as it is the exemplary case of the adoption of the single curriculum in 2009 and the *São Paulo Faz Escola* Project (SPFE) educational textbooks.

In addition to documentary research – which allowed us to know the educational policy in terms of its elaboration and implementation – and bibliographical research – which supported

our analyses –, interviews were conducted with students who attended high school in 2015 and participated in the school occupation movements against the reorganization proposal made by the São Paulo government (Campos, Medeiros & Ribeiro, 2016 ; Catini & Mello, 2016; Januário et al., 2016; Medeiros & Januário, 2017). The analysis material consists of 11 interviews<sup>5</sup> with young people between 18 and 23 years old, six women and five men, dispersed in Greater São Paulo as follows: five reside in the east zone, one in the west zone, one in the north zone, one in Osasco, and one in Guarulhos. At the time of the interview, only one was not studying, and with regard to the others, five were in public universities, four in private higher education institutions, and one in post-secondary education. Non-probabilistic sampling was based on students who had been in different occupations in Greater São Paulo, in order to capture the diversity of this political event (Medeiros & Januário, 2017); the snowball technique (Vinuto, 2014 ), in which the first contacts lead to the others, was used to reach the students. This procedure was important, as in 2019, when we conducted the interviews, there was a kind of exhaustion of contact between former occupants and researchers, to a large extent due to the insistent search for testimonies and interviews, since there was a high academic production on the subject.

The semi-structured interviews used content analysis as a method (Bardin, 2016). A pre-analysis was carried, guiding as to formulating hypotheses, general indicators; it was followed by exploration referenced by the literature on educational policy and student occupations, and culminated in the analysis itself, with the establishment of relationships between the context and the expression of ideas and opinions, which lead to the four categories that organize our analysis, which will be presented below.

The article initially discusses the main characteristics of São Paulo's educational policy over the 24 years referred to, especially with regard to justifications and measures to improve the education quality. Then, we analyzed the content of the interviews based on the following categories: education as *efficiency and performance*, as *instrumental and individualistic*, for *training and plurality*, and as *a collective and democratic experience*. In the final considerations, we weave some interpretations about the meaning of the school guided by managerialism in school experiences and in the formation of high school students.

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<sup>5</sup> The interviews were carried out in the second half of 2019, recorded and transcribed. In this article we analyze information about students' experiences, perceptions and opinions on the school in terms of education quality. The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Unifesp No. 0947/2019.

## The quality of education in the educational policy of São Paulo

“Frustration of having gone to school and realizing that you know little,” this is the summary of the school learning experience reported by one of the interviewees.

Since the first administration analyzed (1995-1998), the main justification for the implementation of the main programs and projects has been education quality improvement. At first, it was linked to the implementation of “an efficient management system for school units, which would allow it to know their real situation” (São Paulo, 1995, p. 8).

In line with the State Reform, carried out during Fernando Henrique Cardoso government (Brazilian Social Democracy Party – PSDB), the first state administration of this party initiated a new cycle of educational policies linked to managerialism, with changes in the institutional-legal framework of educational policies to bring about a cultural change and thus ensure a new form of educational management guided by NPM (Pereira, 2011). The main measures adopted by Teresa Neubauer in the São Paulo State Secretariat of Education (SEE-SP),<sup>6</sup> from 1995 to 2002, were: (i) network reorganization, with separation of schools between those to serve the early years of elementary education and those for the final years and high school, the unified enrollment system and the closure of hundreds of schools; (ii) elementary education municipalization, which contributed to a significant decrease in the state network participation in basic education enrollments in the state – in 1995 it was responsible for 73% of enrollments and in 2018 for 36%<sup>7</sup>; (iii) adoption of continued progression, a measure that, together with the creation of acceleration classes, aimed to reduce the high failure rates and improve school flow, and (iv) creation of the São Paulo State School Performance Assessment System (Saresp). Gabriel Chalita administration (2002-2006) sought to quell the dissatisfaction caused by the measures implemented by Rose Neubauer, both in terms of form and content, adopting the so-called Pedagogy of Affection and the *Escola da Família* Program (PEF), without, however, break with the central aspects of the measures adopted in the previous administration. The PEF intended to foster greater interaction in the school community and meet the demand of communities that suffered from high levels of school violence, through the promotion of cultural and leisure activities on weekends.

<sup>6</sup>Although, since 2019, according to SE Resolution No. 18, the acronym of the Secretariat of Education is Seduce-SP, in this article we will use the one that appears in the consulted documents, SEE-SP.

<sup>7</sup>Data organized by the study, based on the Inept School Census (1995-2018).

It was once again under management commanded by an organic PSDB intellectual<sup>8</sup> – Professor Maria Helena Guimarães de Castro (2007-2009) – that the network underwent profound changes, this time especially related to the curriculum and school management. Under the justification of the low students’ performance in the Saresp results, created in 1996, SEE-SP assumed as the main policy of its management the adoption of a centralized curriculum, with greater direction and control of the pedagogical work.

As part of the School Quality Program (PQE) (São Paulo, 2008a) there was a reformulation of Saresp and the implementation of the Education Development Index of the State of São Paulo (Idesp), defining a bonus for education professionals. Through the *São Paulo Faz Escola* Project (SPFE), a proposal for a centralized curriculum was instituted, with common content directly linked to Saresp. This official curriculum arrived at schools through the so-called Teacher’s, Manager’s and Student’s Educational Textbooks,<sup>9</sup> material with content and didactic guidance for work in the classroom.

Among the justifications for the adoption of a single centralized curriculum it was the idea that international experiences, in view of the countries’ results in the Programme for International Student Assessment (Pisa), indicate “that ... successful educational systems incorporate in their educational practices the results management, clear definition of curricula and their objectives and systematic quality control by all stakeholders” (Fini, 2014, p. 371).

The centralized curriculum with the use of homogeneous material allows greater control of the pedagogical coordination and school management over the processes of compliance with the official curriculum in the school with a view to improving students’ performance in Saresp, given that the external exams are based on the official material, which leads to management by results.

However, this way of facing the problem disregards the complexity of an activity that requires knowledge, creativity, and attention to the relationship with students and reduces knowledge, skills, and attitudes to the task of implementing a curriculum defined elsewhere. As already indicated by Jacomini, Gil and Castro (2018, p. 442),

<sup>8</sup> We refer to the concept of organic intellectual by Antonio Gramsci (2014).

<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of the Program, the material was called *Journal do Aluno* and *Revisit do Professor*.

Between the education content and methodology established in textbooks, booklets or any other material that guides the teacher's work, there are two subjects that give life to the educational process and that make it impossible to have total control over the act of teaching and learning by any scope outside the school. There is a space for creation, which marks the specificity of each teacher in the relationship with students that cannot be controlled by the State through teaching materials, booklets, etc.

Among others, the disregard of these elements – essential to the development of the educational process – by successive governments contributes to each new SEE-SP management's conclusion that, despite previous efforts, the education quality in São Paulo does not correspond to what is established in the policies, which try to measure it by means of indices. Thus, despite SEE-SP's enthusiasm in announcing an improvement in student performance in 2009 Saresp, attributed to SPFE, the Idesp continues to attest that educational policies are not fulfilling the promises of their creators to improve education quality.<sup>10</sup>

The next two administrations (2011-2018) introduced new elements of the managerial conception, especially with the adoption of management based on the Results Improvement Method (MMR), imported from the corporate world, which consists of strategic planning following predetermined steps to identify problems, and plan and implement solutions, whose novelty lies in the fact that the school can only list problems and propose solutions that are within its governance, preventing it from expanding the scope of action in educational policy.

Thus, there is a form of management in which the SEE-SP, in partnership with private sector institutions,<sup>11</sup> formulates the educational policy and the schools implement it, being held responsible (accountability) for the results. Logic that has not produced the quantitative learning result expected by the different SEE-SP administrations, and measured by large-scale evaluations in the studied period, partly by the active and passive resistances that occur in the school routine.

We call passive resistance those in which, without formally opposing educational policies, the school community uses subterfuges in order not to implement them, or at least not

<sup>10</sup> In 2018, the Idesp (state network) was 3.38 for the 9th grade of elementary school and 2.51 for high school. The target for that year was 3.98 and 3.02, respectively. Retrieved from [http://idesp.edunet.sp.gov.br/boletim\\_escola2018.asp?ano=2018](http://idesp.edunet.sp.gov.br/boletim_escola2018.asp?ano=2018)

<sup>11</sup> To carry out the *Programa Educação Compromisso de São Paulo* (São Paulo, 2011), which includes the MMR, SEE-SP signed an agreement with *Associação Parceiros da Educação* (APE), pursuant to SEE-SP Administrative Process No. 2737, in 2014.

according to official guidelines. Active resistance is that in which education professionals and/or students refuse to implement a given policy and fight collectively, as in 2015, with the school occupation against the proposal to reorganize state public schools (Campos, Medeiros & Ribeiro, 2016).

Even before the high school resistance, in the first half of 2015, the teachers carried out the longest strike in the category – 92-days stoppage –, in a clear demonstration that the teachers' career in São Paulo was not becoming one of the most attractive in the country, as announced by Herman Voorwald<sup>12</sup> in 2011. The stoppage, organized by the Apeoesp Union, had as its agenda the following demands: wage readjustment, better working conditions, career enhancement, and the non-closure of classrooms as a result of the educational reform, which would result in the dismissal of around 20,000 teachers and overcrowded classrooms. In the second half of the same year, the announcement of the education network reorganization, with the closure of almost one hundred schools and the transfer of thousands of students to other ones, led students to occupy hundreds of schools, an indication that the school community was not satisfied with the SEE-SP policy.

In response to the student movement, in addition to the retreat in relation to the reorganization, SEE-SP implemented in 2016 the *Projeto Gestão Democrática da Educação: a escola é sua* (São Paulo, 2016) which, in spite of opening a channel of dialogue and participation to the school community, it did so in a protected manner through the creation of student unions, which were, in large part, formed under the principal's guidance and “control,” disregarding or deliberately preventing the experience of horizontal occupation organization from having a wider impact on student participation in schools. Despite the consultation for the formulation of a democratic management proposal carried out in 2016, student participation was proportionally much lower than that of education professionals. As indicated in the study by Jacomini et al. (2019), among education professionals, there was participation of 55% of managers, 33% of school employees, and 29% of teachers, while only 9% of the total number of students enrolled that year participated in the process.

<sup>12</sup> Secretary of Education of the state of São Paulo from 2011 to December 2015.

The richness of experience that placed students at the center of discussions on public education and democratic management was undervalued by SEE-SP, and by many schools (França, 2019).

From this brief summary of educational policies in the period, we proceed to the analysis of the content of the interviews to understand the students' experiences and opinions about education in the state education network.

## **Mismatch between educational policies and student expectations**

In the literature on how young people see secondary school, there is an understanding that this educational institution is a space of tension enhanced by the encounter of youth life spheres: studies, work, family, cultures (Dayrell et al. , 2009; Nakano & Oliveira, 2007). On the one hand, students criticize the precarious conditions of school facilities and the lack of educational materials and spaces, pointing out the unpreparedness of teachers to deal with youth issues, in addition to pronouncing on teacher absenteeism. The methodology inadequacy, contents disconnected from their daily lives, and the lack of didactic materials is presented as a disincentive to pay attention to classes and learning. On the other hand, they are very attentive to a discrepancy between the school manifestations on professional insertion by means of schooling expansion and youth unemployment and underemployment (Corrochano et al., 2017), with special attention to inequalities in the world of work based on gender and race (Proni & Gomes, 2015).

The insistence on schooling as a key to entering professional life and the social mobility and stable sociability resulting from it persisted as an axis of public policies that, by not reducing the queue for young people, generates frustration and discouragement, but also anger and indignation (Medeiros & Januário, 2017). Feelings that are enhanced by a competitive school based on individual performance, which disciplines and controls youth behavior and bodies (Santos, 2017) at the same time, which occurs due to a strong school hierarchy and rigidity and weak or even absent student participation in school decisions.

Conflict is latent and, many times, it erupts because the students have expectations about the school. Space for sociability, construction of subjectivities, friendships and fun; for encounters with diversity and difference, where the desire for a more significant and less painful

transience is, driven by teaching experience and knowledge, that is, the school contains hopes for projects for a better future.

The question then arises: how did the interviewed students experience these aspects in their school career and to what extent can we say that their experiences constitute singularities arising from the educational policy of São Paulo state?

To answer the question, we analyzed testimonials from young people about: external evaluation (Saresp); school space infrastructure (maintenance and building conservation, laboratories and libraries, rooms for pedagogical use); teaching and learning conditions (number of students per classroom, pedagogical incursions outside the school); pedagogical material (SPFE Program Textbooks, São Paulo Curriculum Proposal and use of textbooks from the National Textbook Program – PNLD), and curriculum and content (number of components, importance and adequacy of the contents addressed, methodology and relationship with teachers), aiming to understand how the school experience occurs in different school units, but whose educational policy is established in its principles throughout the public network, to think about student adhesion, criticism, and/or confrontation processes.

From the set of SEE-SP programs and projects, the researchers selected a set of educational policy elements, considering the direct implication in the student experience. Content analysis led us to categorization, so that we built education categories such as education as *efficiency and performance* and *instrumental and individualistic* education. Both are strongly criticized by students in opposition to the categories of education for *formation and plurality*, and education as a *collective and democratic experience*.

The category of education as *efficiency and performance* shows how respondents recognize in school: (i) the incentive to the incorporation of actions aimed at achieving goals; (ii) from what the centrality of external evaluations derives; (iii) as opposed to improving the school units' infrastructure conditions.

This category allows us to analyze how schools are affected by external evaluations and how students unveil the formalization of educational objectives, so that evaluation has become an instrument of political governance and management technique (Lima, 2015).

Taking external exams to verify learning is seen by students as a limited way of evaluating the educational process, as one of the young people says:

*Well, I think that, in a way, Saresp fulfills its function. Because it's going to kind of measure it. But for me this measurement is very subjective, because I think that knowledge cannot be evaluated in this way. Mainly because it also involves psychological issues. Sometimes the knowledge you obtain at a given moment will not be manifested at the time of the exam, you know? (Interviewee 1)*

Assessment as an instrument to guide the teaching and learning process, the relationship between teacher and student and school relations in a broader sense basically focus on the quantification of learning, aiming to reach goals elaborated outside the scope of the school unit.

*And it was really funny. A little sad, the reason for these exams... of how it worked. **Because the school wanted to get a good grade.** And then, what kind of deal did they make with the students? If you come to take the exam you already have a point [in students' grades]. So, everyone went there because they will receive a point (Interviewee 8, emphasis added)*

The inversion of priority in intra-school relations, induced by the pecuniary benefit through the fulfillment of quantified performance goals, erodes the possibility of a democratic management, whose educational project is built and assumed collectively by the school community.

*So, the school gets the best grade, but you see it's not like that. Only in that exam that, sometimes, ended up having a follow-up before the exam itself, to get good results so that the school has a slightly higher grade than the other schools. And then there's the benefit issue. We know this benefit issue, but then you don't see what this benefit turned into. The school gets more money. And what will that money be for? (Interviewee 4)*

Assessment, which is necessary to monitor the educational process, by focusing on Saresp results, contradicts this purpose and inspires processes that are unrelated to training, such as preparation for exams, to reach goals that, as a learning metric, become the school's "meaning and purpose" (Ravitch, 2009). The pressure to participate in the Saresp exams, through the reward of a "bimonthly point" in the subjects and, in some cases, the help of professors "clearing doubts during the exam," even after a "revision" for it to be taken, are examples of the logic that this type of external evaluation has produced in schools. Aware of the pecuniary advantages arising from the achievement of learning goals by the school unit for teachers and managers, for young people the entire pedagogical sequence loses meaning and they feel their needs are neglected. It seems beyond the reach of students' perceptions and understandings that principals and teachers are also trapped in this rationality and, in exchange

for a bonus that complements low remuneration, submit to the restriction of their didactic-pedagogical autonomy, since the most important social function of school is training, of which learning is a part, but it has no purpose in itself.

The effort for students to adhere to the exams, even if participation is episodic, did not have the same weight when it came to minimum infrastructure conditions for studying.

*The room was crowded. But, talking in terms of desks and chairs, there were enough. There were enough for everyone. But there were a lot of people, right? I you talk about structure, there were chairs and desks. I never needed to get [them] in another room. Now, talking about..... for example, there wasn't ... There was window without glass. There were had classrooms without curtains, so as I studied in the morning, the sun was a bit disturbing. Not all fans worked ... the space between one chair and the other was a tiny corridor, right? (Interviewee 2)*

*And, at [school name], the elevator... well, it rained, and it turned into a waterfall.... There was it, but it didn't work. It should be rusty. The cables ... (Interviewee 3)*

*There was a library, but it was in the same place as the video room.... They had a library... It wasn't a space, but they had a space that should be considered the Chemistry room. But there was no equipment to practice Chemistry. (Interviewee 4)*

The school precarious infrastructure conditions compromise teaching and learning process quality and also student training; however, they receive less attention from governments compared to those related to exams and index construction. Lima (2019) addresses the constitution of a counting, measuring education, obsessed with exams that ensures a consensus around meritocratic, competitive and, supposedly, effective regimes.

Despite the NPM defenders' criticism of bureaucracy, bureaucratization is observed through a technical-instrumental rationalist management, which has, in the objectivist and quantitative evaluation, a competent instrument. Thus, there is a hyper bureaucracy that increases control over the educational processes, leaving them "empty," since the objective is a result and the subjects become objects of elaborated and analyzed exams, whose consequence is more centralization and less autonomy, even if this appears as accountability of the subjects who are at the tip of the system (Lima, 2015, 2019).

Thus, the school management becomes “an executive subordinate to the political authorities, although, on the other hand, more powerful in the face of the generalities of school actors, now seen as their subordinates” (Lima, 2019, p. 10), as our interviewees point out.

*The principal told us that they corrected the exams, so they would know who learned and who didn't, and those who didn't learn would get screwed, right? **They always used these vocabularies, mainly to make people really afraid, right?*** (Interviewee 5, emphasis added)

The performance code may be marked in this type of management, but it appears as a technique of a neutral device, moving the school away from the transmission of culture as a common good, since everything that is not operational, useful, and effective is dispensable.

Against the humanization in the culture apprehension that takes place in the socio-political-cultural relationship between subjects, eminently conflictual and alive, there is a set of devices that “depoliticizes political action” (Lima, 2015, p. 1342) and destabilizes teaching professional references with the meaning loss as an agent of culture and student intellectual formation. The school as a technical instrument, therefore, does not work with the conflicts inherent to the pedagogical practice, the power relations in the school, the even expected confrontations that are constitutive of educational spaces, treating the conflict as deviations, that is, as individual behavior deviant from expected adaptation.

The economic and technical-instrumental rationality with the mensuration that overlaps the educational process is also a pedagogical irrationality (Lima, 2019, p. 14) that results in meaning loss in school activities.

The *instrumental and individualistic education* category was constructed from the students' relationship with knowledge through the curriculum, methodologies and relationship with teachers.

*I think that, in my context, I never thought it would be uninteresting, neither Physics nor Chemistry... I mean, the problem is that it doesn't work at school. It doesn't work at school because the policy aimed at teaching these things is not focused on dealing with the students' context issues, it is not centered on really providing basic education. So, you know, giving you a minimum basis of... There is a schedule and the student, regardless of whether he has learned A and B in Elementary School, has to learn C and D there.* (Interviewee 9)

The notion of the right to learning that has been replacing the right to education in the last 30 years by international organizations has eliminated the teaching pole from the teaching and learning process that presupposes subjects in relation to the construction of knowledge (Biesta, 2013). The supremacy of learning subtracts the relationship and the teacher as a political and professional subject to build a directed action of the individual – in this case, the learner –, moved by self-interest, towards the acquisition of flexible skills and, therefore, which are more useful and effective. As Laval (2019, p. 52) states, “this strictly individualistic conception is consistent with the assumptions of orthodox liberal theory: the individual has his own resources that he tries to increase throughout his life to increase his productivity, his income and his social advantages.”

*There is always that most basic idea about the school only serving as an instance of social cohesion for the labor movement. And, also, I think it was more this line of thinking these spaces as not having a proposal directed at our leaving of this model. (Interviewee 9)*

With the imposition of the consensus of education as a service and aimed at users/consumers, education comes down to learning predefined skills in central bodies and/or those external to the educational system (such as private foundations, for example), so that the school organization is structured towards the efficiency and effectiveness of this type of restricted schooling, as it is subject to market demands.

*And...I think the offer of subjects was boring and, also, in...in the expectation about us, this demand for performance, to reach the goal, the result (Interviewee 10).*

*Not for life or to enter the job market. I think not at least [sic]. Because the things I developed professionally did not depend on what I learned at school. It didn't depend on the school. And to enter the university, I didn't have any training either. (Interviewee 1)*

At this point, there are two tensions that make the thermometers rise in real schools: (i) education aimed at particular interests is faced with centralized, uniform curricula subject to standardized assessment, and (ii) students do not recognize themselves in the presupposition of objectives standardized by the notion of utilitarian learning and the promise of personal gains arising from schooling, above all because the educational routine questions it at all times. Hence the need for learning to become easy, attractive, which, in turn, makes it superficial and even banal.

The young students recognize in the PSFE didactic material standardization a limitation for the studies, whose centrality for the pedagogical activity becomes useless, since there are diverse interests and multiple approaches that could be developed by the teachers if the control over the pedagogical process was not central in a school whose focus is the learning quantification and external evaluation data.

*My intention is to say that there is a curriculum that is excluded from school and that, in my view, needs to be within the classroom .... But I think there should be a parameter of equality in the subjects. I wouldn't take anything. But I would try to do something very much in the sense of subject equality.... Specific things are useful for someone. (Interviewee 2)*

*I think that the school proposes to be some things that it is not even doing right. If the school proposes preparing an individual to – if we follow this logic – pass the Enem, to pass an exam, it is not working. So, actually, what is this demand that the school wants to meet, right. (Interviewee 2)*

With the emphasis on learning, there is a reduction in the curriculum for skills aimed at qualifying human capital, what Lima (2019, p. 7) called a vocationalist perspective, aimed at “the key skills that each individual should appropriate-if they provide added value to the labor market.”

*But if the school project is not directed at an individual 's formation for society and for his individuality, if it is just for passing an exam, it's limited to a curriculum that also follows this logic, which does not even serve that purpose. (Interviewee 1)*

*Today we already have a narrow curriculum .... Within the areas that [sic], it can be said, Mathematics and Portuguese are the ones with the most classes, even so it is a narrow curriculum. (Interviewee 2)*

The corrosion of educational relationships and the exacerbation of formalist and technocratic management are confronted with the expectations of students who want to find in the school a place for discoveries and intellectual and personal development. *Most of the things I've learned in my life were due to the fact that I had the initiative to research about. Because the school was very limited. (Interviewee 3)*

But everyday experience makes them part of measurable performance devices, “tending to conceptualize the student as a ‘raw material’ moldable through school ‘production’ processes” (Lima, 2015, p. 1344).

The intense instrumentalization of school education for the market, as human capital, erodes the possibilities of democratic exercise so that control and dehumanization are felt intensely by students.

*And it was a very oppressive treatment. There was no dialogue between the management, between the coordinators and the student.... I liked some teachers. In particular, there were other teachers who fulfilled the State role. This State that ruins education. (Interviewee 3)*

However, the school is also a political and cultural process that opposes the instrumentalization in the relationships between subjects, individually, and in the collective, in the construction of their subjectivities in which the senses of belonging, friendship, and community emerge, which open up individual and collective possibilities. These are the meanings of the *education for training and plurality* category that emerges in the daily struggle for an education whose meaning carries instability, daily dynamics, hope, and expectation.

*For me, school was boring. I went to school and it was bored. So I preferred talking to my friends, roughhousing, laughing, and then get home and research. I think, in terms of the meeting space, yes. The expectation was that I was going to meet a lot of crazy people. Because, well, it's high school. The older people and such. (Interviewee 3)*

As Apple states (2006, p. 136), in pursuit of social balance and system maintenance, “there is a strong tendency towards conformity and denial that conflict is necessary,” when, in fact, “conflicts should be considered as a fundamental and often beneficial dimension of the dialectic of activity that we call society” (Apple, 2006, p. 140).

One dimension of the conflict is linked to the process of the young actors’ subjectivity based on the cultural and political experiences (Castro & Matos, 2009) lived in the occupation movement. Reports obtained through interviews indicate the creative and generating side of political subjects that are born from dissent, that is, from criticism, contestation, and the search for breaking the current social order (Rancière, 1996). Groppo and Silva (2020) observe important processes of political subjectivation,<sup>13</sup> such as, for example, the emergence of the

<sup>13</sup>The concept of political subjectivation, by Jacques Rancière (1996), allows dealing with unconventional actors, actions, and political spaces. The term concerns the notion of politics as disapproval, disturbance, and rupture of structures. It is the process of disidentification with the assigned social role and discoveries about what should be, about oneself based on the collective action of litigation and declassification of reality (Rancière, 1995, p. 66).

feminist agenda within the movement and the debate on equity, indicating that the occupations had a considerable subjective impact on students.

For Groppo and Silva, the collective action of the school occupation movement allowed for political subjectivation and the emergence of perceptions of disidentification in relation to subordinate roles, that is, of questioning the order. Thus, students, understood as little relevant from the point of view of political action, place themselves and discover themselves as political subjects, as central actors.

The clashes between managerialism and the attempt at a meaningful education give rise to hostility, refusal.

*That was it. And then we ended up getting more into this point of the occupation also with the way of teaching. Because we end up questioning that and end up seeing that it was no longer pleasant. And we always questioned everything. (Interviewee 4)*

The occupation experience allowed the disidentification in relation to the teaching model, on the effects of educational policies guided by managerial logic, but also in relation to the image of the passive student in the face of the imperatives of the institutional education structure. The relationship between the occupation experience and the process of political subjectivation (Rancière, 2014), as Groppo and Silva (2020) state, would be in the creation of mechanisms for the formation of new social roles, of identities that until then had been “erased.”

The rule standardization, the content formalization, and the behavior standardization are challenged by the encounter of subjects and their stories, a power that is amplified in diversity.

*I think a very important thing I brought to life was having contact with different people. Because when we are at home, we have only one type of thought and know one way of living, right? .... And that's it, a series of people from various places, with very different stories that you learn about. (Interviewee 5)*

The elements evaluated as training for students go beyond the conception of training for work, for competitiveness or for personal success, and, in a certain sense, opposing it, emphasize that personal and unique development is intimately related to school environment and what is expected of it.

*I think the school should be a welcoming place. I think the school should be a place that welcomes the most diverse adversities, right? That's it. The school should welcome diversity and perhaps, based on this diversity of the individual, establish a path, right? Be this path of transformation of the environment, of the individual, of ideas. I think the school should be a place where the student feels welcomed. And not segregated.* (Interviewee 2)

It is noted, in the statement, that the school is valued as a family experience, as cozy as it is uncomfortable, when it was threatened by the reorganization in 2015 (Goulart et al., 2017).

*I think it was something that came from here. Which is to occupy something like "Wow, this is part of my community. This is mine," you know? I'm part of it. And it's my house. How are you going to dismantle my house?"* (Interviewee 2)

Thus, despite the problems linked to the impositions of the managerial model, the experience lived at school by students provides what we call *collective and democratic education*. There is a resignification of the school space, in the sense that the school occupation movement, contrary to school reorganization, would have allowed mobilized students, even if temporarily, to participate in decision-making moments of collective interest and school organization, involving practical actions of everyday life, fight strategies, such as the organization of classes and workshops that made up programs within the occupations, but also provided the students with perception of the support from different groups in civil society (Medeiros et al., 2019) and the reaction of managers, the military police, and conservative segments of São Paulo society (Patta, 2017; Tavorari et al., 2018).

As Ramos (2020) states, the narratives of the students who participated in the occupation movement, in the 2015-2016 context, indicate a gain in the political movement, that is, a gain in perception and awareness of the domains of public space, "of the awareness of the right to participate in collective life, of the commitment necessary to build the society in which one wants to live" (Ramos, 2020, p. 228).

An important element at this point, regarding *collective and democratic education*, is the experience in student unions, which enabled being engaged in collective fight inside and outside the school, as indicated by the interviewees' statements: "*The student club has taken on such a huge proportion in people's lives.... So that's where we're going to organize ourselves*" (Interviewee 2) and "*When we went through the whole fight process, there came a time when we arrived at what would probably be public*

*education itself, in general. And that the demand for resolving this will be more democratic management”* (Interviewee 9).

On the other hand, at the same time that student unions appear as a model of democratic management desired by students, they run into conflicts with school management and public managers and their models of “democracy,” which hinders the participation of socio-educational actors in decision-making projects (Lima, 2014).

*There was a project that came to us... named Gestão Democrática, I think... Gestão Democrática, I believe. And Gestão Democrática was during the time of the principal who I mentioned as having a certain fear and such. And then, she sat down and we started: “What can we do?” Because she said that that was democracy, so she put a representative from each room and there was her Gestão Democrática.* (Interviewee 8)

Although many schools already had the student union experience before the context of high school mobilization, in 2015, the organization of collective action against school reorganization boosted several issues (Campos, 2019), such as the lack of transparency in the management of state education and the absence of democratic and participatory management (Arelaro et al., 2016; Moraes & Ximenes, 2016; Ribeiro, 2018). Some interviewees state that, through the occupations, there was a collective awareness of the school belonging to the school community, in a sense of solidarity and projecting an education that opposed individualism: *“It was a collective effort. By everyone. It ended up adding a very sentimental value, of mental awareness”* (Interviewee 4) and *“Well, it’s not me. It’s not just me. It’s like my brother next door, it’s my sister over there, it’s the teacher who leaves when the bell rings”* (Interviewee 3). Despite the precarious working conditions, the students maintained a positive relationship of belonging with the school and, with that, claimed the constitutional right to the universality of a basic education with quality, equality and with respect for the diversity of positions and interests of the students, teachers, and community (Moraes & Ximenes, 2016).

To think about the *collective and democratic education* category, the high school student movement, with a predominance of autonomist repertoire, it is certainly important to understand how occupied schools built forms of decision making and tasks that prioritized self-organization and horizontality (Rede Escola Pública e Universidade, 2019). Occupations were generated in such a way that decisions of collective interest were always taken in assemblies, and the day-to-day dynamics of the occupied school were organized respecting the principle of

horizontalidade e a ideia de construir uma imagem positiva de movimento, transmitindo seriedade que contrasta com a imagem de “invasores” e “vândalos” criada pela mídia mainstream e pelo governo (Campos, 2019; Canesin, 2018).

Decisões coletivas sobre a direção do movimento e suas organizações, sobre os conteúdos de “classes públicas,” por exemplo, e outras atividades políticas e culturais foram geralmente feitas em uma base rotativa<sup>14</sup> (Catini & Mello, 2016).

*But at the time we were very concerned about having a collective and very horizontal action. **There was no hierarchy or, I don't know, the leadership was more politicized. No, there was none of that. Everyone had to have [sic], fulfill a common role, you know? Among everyone...** The convictions I have today in relation to cooperation, **solidarity**, is... how much I believe and I am willing to build things in a **self-managed** way, **horizontally**, and I believe in popular power, in what is built on the basis, with the basis. It comes a lot because of the experience with the occupations, because I saw that it is possible to build things in a collective way. (Interviewee 10, emphasis added)*

Com base nessas experiências de autogestão e horizontalidade, importantes mudanças foram feitas nas relações entre estudantes, como romper com relações de gênero que reproduziam estereótipos. As meninas foram capazes de assumir posições de liderança, enquanto os meninos realizavam tarefas de limpeza e alimentação. Com isso, há uma atenção à diversidade, sobre questões de igualdade de gênero e a comunidade LGBTQI+ (Campos et al., 2016; Moresco, 2019).

*... we were mostly women. And it was very interesting, because we were left with tasks more focused on the fight political development, external relations with other students, taking care of more political and reflexive dynamics of the movement. While the boys, because they are not as mature as we are in the debates, they ended up taking on more practical tasks. So it's cleaning, it's making the food, it's... And that wasn't something determined, it wasn't, “ah, I don't know, issues of historical compensation, let's divide the tasks like this.” No, it was natural. It was only as occupations took place that we observed that there was an inversion of roles within the organizations. (Interviewee 10)*

É observado que os jovens estavam construindo um projeto escolar desejado, buscando maneiras alternativas de capitalizar a educação, opondo-se, mesmo que indiretamente, ao managerialismo e à formação de capital humano, como um conjunto de habilidades, competências e conhecimentos que o

<sup>14</sup> Desde que a autogestão e a horizontalidade são marcas registradas da vida cotidiana nas ocupações, as tarefas foram debatidas e assumidas coletivamente pelos ocupantes e, em muitos casos, os estudantes alternaram seus papéis, em uma espécie de alternância.

individual have to “accumulate.” It is necessary to mention that this process developed within the high school movement did not occur without conflicts between students. Although our interviews did not capture situations of misunderstanding, episodes of prejudice and resistance to more progressive ideas within the movement are known in the literature (Campos, 2019; Marin, 2017; Patta, 2017; Ramos, 2020), especially in relation to the proposals linked to feminism. Having made this observation, it is possible to state that, in general, the students thought of a school project that considers diversity and that opposes the constant “search for efficiency,” which ends up homogenizing students through standardized exams, which put in their indexes the objective of the educational process.

*Maybe we were kind of opposing the idea of school. So, I don't think anyone knew what they wanted to build in themselves. It was a fact. **But I didn't want to continue with that model. So we suggested an opposition to the model.** So things also came about in a very practical way. So, for me, my education, when I think about the axis that I thought at that moment, I would say that it was the way we were interacting it was to build education. (Interviewee 4, our emphasis)*

*... it's just like that, I think the meaning of education today has been emptied, right? ... And I think that the main thing I would change was, precisely, tra... is to bring meaning back to... to teaching, to education, to construction of knowledge .... **In the end we only realized that we were fighting for this type of school because it was built during the movement, which is a horizontal, self-managed, popular and open, critical school.** So...I think that the fight itself led us to our motivations, it revealed our desires. (Interviewee 10, emphasis added)*

Therefore, the young people's proposal would be to build classes and activities that arise from the students' demands. Dialoguing with the school community, understanding the school as a living and pulsating public space, as a space for lectures, workshops, arts and diversity and plurality of educational actions (Rede Escola Pública e Universidade, 2019). In this sense, they built re-signified classes, while criticizing the school form of capitalism (Catini & Melo, 2016).

*The issue of public classes, I think it was a missing element, because there was also the issue of lack of information, lack of debate. Those teachers who were willing to build these public classes, I think they also didn't realize that it was a form of training, right ... Many of the questions there arose as proposals from the students. So I would say that... That's why I believe I would also think that there was an education process, because they were demands that were emerging during the process... And then we... and thus managed **to create relationships with the community and with knowledge that was not only school knowledge, right? Knowledge... from licensed or graduated people. Varied knowledge from different types of people willing to do this, right?** And in peripheral schools it is... this process was even cooler. Because it really is a more communal relationship. (Interviewee 9, emphasis added)*

By adopting measures centered on large-scale evaluations, the SEE-SP leaves little room for effectively democratic organizational proposals, opposing the participation of teachers, students and the entire school community in the proposals for the pedagogical plan and in the school daily life, even if there are the formal existence of Student Councils and Unions (Arelaro et al., 2016). Students, in the daily occupations, sought to mobilize against such educational policies, raising the importance of student participation in the construction of the educational process.

With the occupation movement weakening, many students sought, through unions, to continue student militancy and the process of building a collective and more democratic education. Schools that already had an association sought to strengthen the organization based on the movement experience, and many schools that did not have an association began to organize it. The student proposal was to build strong associations to promote greater student participation in the various subjects of school life.

Despite the efforts of student organization, José Renato Nalini's project of "democratic management" (2016-2018), supposedly to encourage the formation of students clubs under the guidance of school managers, served as a tool to control and repress autonomous organization and student participation. The *Gestão Democrática: a escola é sua* project was presented as an action to expand student participation, with the intention that all schools in the state public network would form their student clubs. Under the appearance of openness to dialogue, the announced

policy<sup>15</sup> would have been, in practice, an interventionist and authoritarian measure, serving as a control tool and reinforcement of the managerialist model (Ramos, 2020).

## Final considerations

Educational policies are normally supported by the argument that they are necessary and urgent, with students as central subjects, although lack of student participation in their definition, implementation, and evaluation is recurrent. In this text, we sought to dialogue with students about the educational policy of São Paulo state that was part of the school trajectory of all interviewees, on a daily basis.

It called our attention that, in the critical field, there are also few studies that deal with students' vision/evaluation/action on educational policy, whether in a broader sense, as we intend to do here, or directed to a specific program.

To do so, we sought, through interviews, to capture how students experienced educational policies in the school routine in different dimensions: educational, socializing, formative, considering conflict as part of the relationships between school subjects, within schools, between these and SEE-SP intermediate spheres that, in the period studied, were guided by a managerial administration, such as ordering programs and more common guidelines.

If the criticisms are numerous and the dissatisfaction is evident, the affirmation of training and school relations between equals with their diversity is also an element that is inscribed in the tension that these students imprint on schools. What may seem to several professors an irresponsible mess, can be read, here, as a curious overflow.

Our analyzes of the students' experience in relation to the 2015 occupation movement and their perceptions and opinions about educational policies allow us to state that educational proposals aimed at efficiency and performance, in an instrumental and individualistic key, contrast with a demand that appears in diverse ways for an education guided by the integral formation and by the plurality grounded in the collective and democratic experience. These

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<sup>15</sup> The announcement and proposal for the program, published on February 16, 2016, can be consulted on the website of the Secretariat of Education: <https://www.educacao.sp.gov.br/noticias/educacao-anuncia-formacao-de-gremios-em-todas-as-escolas-com-voto-direto-de-alunos/>

contradictions, at the same time that denounce the inadequacy of educational policies for public school students coming from the popular classes, indicate possibilities of “invention” of a school with other educational possibilities.

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