

Educational macro-policies and the school management micro-policy: repercussions on the health of workers¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze and interpret the policies of labor management in force in the public school system of Rio de Janeiro, in its relationship with the health of school workers. By means of qualitative research, workers from twelve schools were interviewed, and the interviews were interpreted according to an approach of discourse analysis. The policies that were most quoted by the interviewees were: administrative policies associated with the health of education professionals, such as functional rehabilitation and medical leave; the policies associated with teaching practices, such as automatic promotion, the system of cycles and the New School Program; and, also, the policies associated with the current model of public management, such as outsourced employees. We found that the hegemonic paradigm of labor management has not taken into consideration the context of the labor where the micro-political management of this activity is performed. Building on the interviews, we verified how much the educational macro-policies and the governmental measures can determine the current circumstances of health among education professionals, so that a set of actions is necessary to change the conditions and the organization of labor which cause the sickening of workers, and also the development of participative policies in the workplaces in order to reduce the leaves for medical reasons. We developed the argument that is necessary to know and transform the social and economic effects arising from the absence of public macro-policy of health intended for the labor in the schools.

Keywords

Public policies – Workers' Health – Labor in Schools – Education Workers – Functional rehabilitation.

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As macropolíticas educacionais e a micropolítica de gestão escolar: repercussões na saúde dos trabalhadores^I

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Resumo

O objetivo do presente artigo é analisar e interpretar as políticas de gestão do trabalho em vigor na rede de educação pública do Rio de Janeiro, em sua relação com a saúde dos trabalhadores de escolas. Por intermédio de uma pesquisa de base qualitativa, foram entrevistados trabalhadores de doze escolas, sendo as entrevistas interpretadas segundo o enfoque da análise do discurso. As políticas mais citadas pelos entrevistados foram: as políticas administrativas relacionadas à saúde dos profissionais da educação, como a readaptação funcional e a licença médica; as políticas relacionadas a práticas pedagógicas, como a política de aprovação automática, o sistema de ciclos e o Programa Nova Escola; e, ainda, as políticas relacionadas ao atual modelo de gestão pública, como a terceirização de funcionários. Constatamos que o paradigma hegemônico de gestão do trabalho em escolas não tem levado em consideração o contexto do trabalho onde se efetiva a gestão micropolítica dessa atividade. A partir das entrevistas, verificamos o quanto as macropolíticas educacionais e as medidas governamentais podem ser determinantes das atuais circunstâncias de saúde dos profissionais da educação, sendo necessário um conjunto de medidas para modificar as condições e a organização do trabalho que são geradoras de adoecimento, como o desenvolvimento de políticas participativas nos locais de trabalho para diminuir os afastamentos por motivo de saúde. Desenvolvemos o argumento de que é preciso conhecer e transformar os efeitos sociais e econômicos originados da ausência de uma macropolítica pública de saúde voltada para o trabalho em escolas.

Palavras-chave

Políticas públicas – Saúde do trabalhador – Trabalho em escolas – Trabalhadores da educação – Readaptação funcional.

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According to Mascarello and Barros (2007), the precarious and deteriorated situation of schools which make up the public education system in Brazil points to the way the governments have placed financial investments onto public policies in this country. The field of education has experienced a chronic process of insufficiency of funds, which generates the scrapping of the public system giving visibility, among other aspects, to the process of health and disease of educational workers. As the authors above see it, the operating model of public education in Brazil is rooted in the principles of the general theory of administration, out of which the social division of labor is a highlight as a way of rationalizing the school labor, by emphasizing its efficiency and productivity. Such hegemonic management paradigm does not take into consideration the context of the work at school. For Alves (2010), it is fundamental to understand the complex reality of school labor and lore produced by the workers. That is because many educational policies, although they present themselves as cutting-edge, they are based on a limited understanding of what management is about and what the human labor is about. The context in which the labor is performed is seldom questioned. There is a rationality that reduces the labor situations which usually comes along with the management actions, compromising the social purpose of the school institutions and reverberating on male and female workers.

In a research conducted in school of Rio de Janeiro, Brito and Athayde (2003) point out the great heterogeneity found among the schools in the public system, considering their general precarious conditions. Even though the schools are workplaces ruled institutional norms shared by the entire system they belong to, there are specific norms in every school, not always formalized in writing. For those authors, there is a micro policy that must be better understood.

In fact, in the absence of broad policies to regulate actions favoring the health and

well-fare at work, some studies (ALVES, 2010; SOUZA, 2009; MASCARELLO; BARROS, 2007) have revealed, in the daily school labor routine, a micro policy that may contribute to perpetuate practices of power and domination in the workplaces. It is, according to Foucault (2004), a form of microscopic power, a ways of managing human beings and controlling their activities and the multiple manners of working.

This study is based on the assumption that the general institutional norms – here deemed as macro policies of labor management – are rules of procedure that do not take into account the tangible reality of labor as a central issue in their conception and which, sometimes, in a perspective entirely diverse of labor appreciation, develop mechanisms of administrative control and punishment onto the education workers.

One must remember that in the contemporary models of labor organization the workers, when dealing with the various and complex situations, generally develop strategies which often cheat on the norms but achieve better results in performing the activity and in the psychic saving of the individuals (ABRAHÃO; TORRES, 2004). According to Sato (2002), the workers conduct, as much as possible, changes in the work with the purpose of preserving their health. For, despite the power and the control being in the workplace – clearly in favor of the managerial body and the capital –, the workers create mechanisms so that *micro negotiations* are processed.

Studies addressing labor in schools mention a number of health problems associated with the following conditions including: inadequate classrooms with an excess of students, repetitive work, accelerated rhythm, overload and intensification of work trespassing the hours of rest, absence of adequate materials and equipment, excessive noise (ASSUNÇÃO; OLIVEIRA, 2009; BARROS et al., 2007; BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003). Regarding the teaching work, in particular, the following studies, specific of mental health must be highlighted (ARAÚJO;

CARVALHO, 2009; NEVES; SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2006; DELCOR et al., 2004).

Thus, it should be remembered the days off and sick leaves due to illness are important indicator of labor health. Gasparini, Barreto, and Assunção (2005) sought to understand the teachers' health-illness process looking for the possible associations with the sick days for health reasons. For the authors, the working conditions, that is, the circumstances under which teachers mobilize their physical, cognitive and emotional skills to achieve the objectives of the school production, may generate an over-effort or hyper-request of their psycho-physiological functions. If there is no time for recovery, clinical symptoms are triggered or precipitated which would explain the rates of sick days, such as nervousness, anguish, irritability, weeping, difficulty to focus on tasks and insomnia (NEVES; SELIGMANN-SILVA, 2006; DELCOR et al., 2004; BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003).

This paper has the purpose of analyzing the policies of labor management enforced in the public education system of Rio de Janeiro in their association with health, under the perspective of the education workers. We develop the argument according to which the educational macro-policies and the governmental measures may be determinant of the current health conditions found among education workers. Thus, we present the results of the interviews with workers from public schools, and we acknowledge that possibly some of the policies mentioned are no longer in force at the moment, which, however, does not affect the heart of the problem.

Methodology

The theme of this paper arises from the interviews conducted by Souza (2009) with 12 female workers from several jobs in 12 schools of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Along 2007, we interviewed teacher, inspectors, attendants and meal servers, including nine of them who were

on duty in offices of their labor union (Rio de Janeiro State Union of Educational Workers – SEPE-RJ) at the time of study. The criterion to participate in the study was the fact they had been in the first phase of the Training on Health, Gender and Labor in public schools of Rio de Janeiro (SILVA et al., 2009; BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003). Out of 14 program participants, we interviewed 12 at random, with no previous definition of their office or job, considering that SEPE-RJ is a unified union where all workers participate in the same organization, and there is no distinctions involving assignment or activity of work. We also chose to follow the criterion of accessibility: two workers, out of 14, were not located and, therefore, the study was conducted with twelve participants.

It must be stressed that such program integrated academic institutions (FIOCRUZ, UERJ, UFPB e ABRASCO) and trade unions (SEPE-RJ and SINTEM-PB), with the main purpose of comprehending and transforming the work in its relationship with health, by means of a proposal for the training of school workers.

In this paper we chose to analyze the policies of school labor management in the perspective of education workers who were active at the same time in the schools and in the trade-union issues, as well as in the critical debates about the goals of training.

Thus, a qualitative study was conducted in which the interviews followed a semi-structured script, with open questions about the changes necessary in the school work in order to promote the education workers' health. In response to the question *For you, what is the meaning of changing the work in the schools?*, references to the labor management policies were frequent, and they will now be comprehended in the light of the experience of the interviewees.

The procedure we adopted to treat the interviews was the repeated reading of the transcribed texts, building on the discourse analysis and following a tradition of argumentative and interpretative studies in

qualitative research. For Gill (2008), the term *discourse* is employed to refer to all forms of speech and text. Out of the discourse analysis A, “one may see social life as characterized by several kinds of conflicts” (GILL, 2008, p. 250). As a result, text and context become a complex unit of meanings. With this technique, the text is the object (*corpus* of research) and it gives rise to thematic approaches according to a “unit of meaning” (MINAYO, 2011, p. 358). Strictly speaking, our criterion to sort out the materials was empirical, that is, we defined categorizations, taking from the very accounts the nuances of meaning assigned to the each theme, highlighting the viewpoint of the education workers and analyzing what was homogeneous and what was different. Then the outcome was a text constructed by thematic units with interpretative analyses of theoretical-critical nature.

We organized the presentation of our results by starting with each unit of analysis with a thought or a discourse-synthesis withdrawn from our interviews with the workers. The objective is to point out the rank of meanings appearing in the interviews with fragment of individual speeches. It is a way of reconstructing discourse, a gimmick to sort out the results.

The study was conducted in compliance with the ethical standards set forth in Resolution CONEP No. 196/96 and it was approved the Research Ethics Board of ENSP/FIOCRUZ – CEP/ENSP No. 45/07.

Results and discussion

In the interviews with education workers, they designated the governmental policies, generically, as policies. They referred to them both as *education policies*, and as *government measures*, or also, simply, as *policies*, which, in general, are translated as a set of normative measures existing in the sphere of public management, either by means of pedagogical programs and projects (*stricto sensu*), or by means of administrative norms (ordinances,

general and specific regulations). All of them share the fact that they have been quoted because they affect the everyday school routine and, particularly, the health of professional working in the schools. In a complementary manner, it is useful to adopt the definition by Cury (2002, p. 147) according to which the education policies “including everything, from the classroom to the education plans in a wide sense”. The policies that were mostly mentioned by the interviewees were those associated with health, such as functional rehabilitation and medical leave (RIO DE JANEIRO, 1979); the policies related to pedagogical practices, such as the automatic promotion and the system of cycles; and, also, the policies regarding the current model of public management, such and the New School Program and the outsourcing of employees.

Everyone goes in search of their own individual responses.

One of the aspects constantly quoted in the interviews is that of the *individual responses* that everyone adopts to resolve their own problems associated with health, in detriment of the collective forms of changing the working conditions: each one goes in search of solutions for his/her own situation, for example, being temporarily absent from the job by recurring to medical leaves or making deals with his/her boss. The hard to avoid needs of support for the material life together with the low salaries make education workers surrender themselves to a variety of situations and precarious working conditions, as the following account confirms:

I have two registers, one in the city and the other in the State, which provide me with double teaching jobs, which I accept. In order to meet the demand of my personal needs of food, housing, meals, health, I have to work twice, three times, four times my hours of work. I get back to the vicious cycle. I get exhausted. I can resolve my health problem and I keep looking for a

way, an individual way, that I will be able to resolve my problem and it is never a collective issue. [...] We, education workers, disaggregate and everyone cares for their own business only. Each one is in search for his/her own response, in an effort not to get sick. Everyone goes in search of their own individual responses. (Worker G)

Costa (2004) says the strategies utilized by the education workers in defense of their health, as they are limited to the individual context, do not bring effective responses to the problems associated with harmfulness of the working environment. Actually, the *personal tricks* adopted in the daily chores to avoid getting ill just reinforce the existing problems, as they do not eliminate what generate them. However, we understand that the defensive strategies (DEJOURS, 2004), even with their mistakes, should not be seen as exclusively negative, but as possible ways that one has to build other potential forms of promoting his/her own health (SILVA et al., 2009).

If you take a medical leave, you lose gratification.

Interviewees complain that a worker's medical leave record makes the benefits unfeasible for them. About that, they mention two government policies – on state level and on federal level: the New School Program and Fundeb. They argue that such programs condition the right to get a benefit and its gratifications to the worker's lack of health problems in a given period:

But these are things that end up being stopped by the very state and local administration. For example, you have the New School Program where the gratification depends on some productivity that cannot be interrupted: if you take medical leave, for example, you lose the gratification. Now, in the local network of Volta Redonda, we face the same issue,

and, every third month, we absurdly have a gratification that should be continued from Fundeb and it is already tied up there and who get a medical leave loses such gratification. Thus, no matter how much the workers' critical view has change in such direction – “Say, you have to get a record [of your health problem], you need to go there” –, they end up not doing it: “Listen, I won't do it because I'll lose money”. Then, more important than not getting sick is eating and people need to make sure they will have food at home, so that they will not get sick. I think this is a very serious issue. (Worker O)

Certain administrative measures, as those aforementioned, ultimately have disaggregating effects on the life of people who work in schools. It is necessary to consider, as weighs the interviewee, that the State evaluation policies, likewise the New School Program Nova Escola, may eventually have a punitive character. They are policies that regulate the school management and exert, by means of compensatory measures such as salary additions, control of missing days and leaves for health reasons, which makes people work even when they are ill. Besides, the evaluation policies focus several other aspects of the school management in technocratic perspective. Understanding this situation requires a careful analysis which takes into account the internal dynamics of relations in the schools and the real work.

It is known that the main operational mechanism of New School Program, implemented by the Rio de Janeiro State Department of Education in 2000, is an ongoing evaluation system for the public schools, designed to check both the management and the educational processes in each school. According to Brooke (2006), the demanding for more information about the school system has been answered with the implementation of *accountability* policies, that is, assigning *responsibilities*, through which the information

about the work in the schools becomes public and so the managers and other members of the school staff are considered co-responsible for the level of performance reached by the institution. In the opinion of the author, the evaluation policy carried out by the education system is directly linked to the neoliberal policies of educational reform initially appearing in England and in the United States, contexts that are different from the Brazilian situation both in what concerns the cultural aspects and in what regards the appreciation of the school labor. Thus, the *responsibility* policies generate *rankings* of schools and stimulate competition without taking into consideration the socioeconomic differences and the previous learning that students may have, causing negative reactions, deterrent and exclusion.

There is a very high rate of professional under leave due to health problems, but nobody is worried with that... The pain we feel is nobody else's business.

Concerning the work, according to interviewees, they are perceived as a escape, since they are a way of not facing the problem collectively. When the individual situation becomes unbearable, the choice is to be absent, what one manages to do by getting repeated medical leaves. However, the solution is only postponed for a problem that is not perceived as dealing with collective health. According to Souza and Leite (2011), the theme of teaching labor organization emerges as a core issue in the field of education. Thus, it becomes central to analyze the defenses devised by education workers, as well as their limits and possibilities to protect them from the situations that surround them, such stress and labor overload.

When one reaches the issue of health and conditions of work, people do not question, they do not look for solutions and they end up accepting what is going on and see as a escape what we have already included

in our documentation: ask for a medical leave: "Well, I have a problem, I don't want to make a deal; I'm going to get a medical leave; at least, I run away for a while from this problem I'm going through in the school". But the person doesn't seek a change in themselves. A teacher, for example, has a relationship problem, because the school managers despotic. The teacher does not question; they simply run. Many question themselves: "Is this really so?"; "Look, my colleague is on a leave!". But you don't take it as something you should fight for, for your health. [...] When teachers want salary, they go on strike; they stop for this and that reason, but they do not stop, for example, because of health. There is a very high rate of workers on leave due to health problems, but they don't care; they just take the leave and seek to get better at home; then, they get back to work. (Worker U)

Many go on because they have nothing else to do and they just go through the motions and, then, the famous sick notes that we call *bombril* (NT: refers to the advertisement of a steel woolen saying it had 'a thousand uses'). One goes see the doctor, gets a sick note and go through the motions. [...] There are a great number of cases. (Worker I)

In a study conducted by Neves and Seligmann-Silva (2006), the authors found that the teachers devise collective and individual excuses (DEJOURS, 2004), including *missing work in order not to miss work* (so they will not get sick); the constant escapes from the classroom; the relationships of mistrust among coworkers and other professionals; individualism and lack of emotional and cognitive engagement. According to Gasparini, Barreto and Assunção (2005), data about leaves resulting from medical reasons, although they do not indicate the real magnitude of the health

problems of a given category of workers, may be taken as clues about situations that deserve an in-depth approach and analysis. The authors say that, in relation to time teachers are off (sick), the psychic ailments are responsible for most cases.

Indeed, the multiplicity of complaints mentioned in relation to school labor routine makes teachers to devise strategies of local and individual resistance against the dissatisfaction of such organization, which no doubt would demand a system of follow-up of the work conditions and of the signs of illness (BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003).

Interviewees refer to the fact that *a generalized distrust* still persist in the labor relationships in the schools. Prejudices and stereotypes prevail and distort reality, leading to the conclusion that everybody cheats so that they can be off work on a sick day.

The employee said: "Our pain we feel is nobody else's business". That is, nobody believes that you are sick, only if you fall down. Then, they say: "No, So-and-so is sick". [...] They think you're cheating, you're escaping. Then, it is exactly it: I am aware of the problem and of what it is related to, but I don't try and help in solving the problem. [...] Maybe I cannot help you personally, but I can help change what made this situation possible, if I know that place there is harming you. But I don't seek the improvement. (Worker U)

There is an ideological difficulty. Educational policies and public policies are tuned with the market, with the devaluation of the human being.

In relation to the public policies of education, including those aimed at the workers in the area, there is a feeling that such policies are oriented towards quantifiable values, market values. Schwartz and Durrive (2007) say that, in Brazil and in other countries such as France, the education policy has strong Taylorist and

Fordist components, whose emphasis is on the mercantile and economic values or *economicist values*, in detriment to the quality of the working process and its outcome in public education.

The economic, economicist aspect the government applies in the school, in my opinion, is what determines what happens today within the school ambience. Every pedagogical project implemented by the government is not intended for the student's learning, but rather apply as little as possible public funds in public education. [...] We has almost half the network of services in Cieps full time. Today, there is virtually no full-time service. We had a document by the very Education Department, an ordinance which regulated the number of students per class and shift; this has not been applied, the classrooms are still overcrowded. (Trabalhador G)

There is a paradox here, since despite education being conceived as a social good, in the current model of the Brazilian state, an economic rationality of service measurement and quantification is adopted. According to this logic, it is indispensable to size, in numbers, the *results* of the labor in the schools, since there is the allocation of financial funds for which one is *accountable* towards society at large. In the view of some interviewees, public policies tuned with market deviate from the true objectives of education and health (and labor), and imply the fact that the government takes actions to recover these values.

In effect, it is also necessary to consider the influence the international policies in the conception and formulation of the Brazilian educational policies. Policies devised by the World Bank brought a negative impact to the internal functioning of the schools. These policies became *primers* for the preparation of educational plans – under a neoliberal approach – in the federal, state and municipal levels, affecting the local policies as of school

organization and deepening the duality of the current Brazilian public school, which the author characterizes as “a school of knowledge for the rich and a school of welcome for the poor” (LIBÂNEO, 2012, p. 13).

There is an ideological difficulty. Educational policies and public policies are tuned with the market, with the devaluation of the ser human being. Then, it is an ideological dispute. [...] there is an entire guidance that says: “This is not your business, you go see the doctor, you handle it, you take some medicine, you take anti-depressives, you get a one-month long leave and you’re done”. This should not be like this because, when you come back, the problems are all there. I mean, this is very serious and difficult. (Worker D)

Today you don’t have a view within the government, of what would actually be the concept of health. The government points out and detects and sometimes even takes actions to prevent you from being off on a leave, when the illness is already installed. Then, I think that the first thing to do would be changing this concept that the government has about what health really is. Health is not losing it. [...] I think that, if you cannot do it, you don’t realize that you would spend a lot less than you do once health is gone and the illness is present. (Worker R)

These people are always in rehab.

Based on the workers’ accounts, let’s now take a look at the example of a real policy of health management for public servants: the functional rehabilitation, which still persists and generates discriminations and prejudice among the workers themselves in the school ambience.

The other day I heard a criticism: “These people are always in rehab”. It seems it is so because they wish so, they are in rehab

because they want to be in it, as if they did it on purpose so that they will not work at all. When a teacher says that, when he or she expresses such criticism, I mean, he or she is not aware of what happens within the school, the kitchen. Let’s us say that it is the greatest number of persons in rehab. (Worker M)

Some studies, such as the one by Nunes (2000), show with data surveyed in the Medical Examination of the Rio de Janeiro State (Superintendency of Health and Quality of Life), that rehabilitation results from a long process, performed in compliance with administrative principles and based on medical examination reports, whose focus is individual and whose major criteria are those legitimated by certain medical expertise fields (psychiatry, rheumatology, cardiology, orthopedics, neurology and otorhinolaryngology, in addition to general practice). The procedure adopted by this agency indicates a service that is fragmented, away from the general issues of labor and alien to the living experience of workers.

For example, if a person has a pain in his/her leg, if their legs are weak and they are sent to rehab, the doctor will say what he or she is able to do. And what can they do if the problem is in both legs? She can’t cook but she peels the vegetable and washes the dishes. Peeling vegetables, you can do it when you’re sitting, but washing the dishes, it is not possible. [...] When you have to go through a a medical committee, is humiliating. They doubt you. Last time I was on sick leave because of stress, I had 22 furuncles. [...] When I was with the last doctor, I was crying when I got into her office, because I was really tired. Then she looked at me and said: “My dear, psychiatry is not in this office, it is somewhere else”. Do you know the meaning of ‘I wanna die’? That was all what I wanted, you see... (Worker N)

There is an important aspect to be considered in the process of rehabilitation for labor, confirmed by the scarce literature on the subject (BATISTA; JULIANI; AYRES, 2010; FANTINI; SILVEIRA; LA ROCCA, 2010; MEDEIROS; BARRETO; ASSUNÇÃO, 2006), concerning its implications in the workers' subjectivity: rehabilitation cannot be reduced to the clinical disturbances only, in which the cause of illness is centered in biomedical factors. It is a complex process that compromises someone's life, preventing them from work. If we look for the meaning of the work *rehabilitation*, in its prefix (re), we find the sense of repetition, effort. Therefore comes the idea of being able again, with a hidden understanding that man must adapt himself to work so he is able to do it, or also, that he must readapt himself to work (GOMES, 2010). Such meaning is contrary to what should really happen, which *the adaptation of the work to the man*, not *the adaptation of the man to the work*. This idea is one of the founding basis of ergonomics arising from the French-Belgium school which, since its early times, indicates that the major cause of a worker getting ill comes from the inadequacy of job posts to man (GUÉRIN et al., 2001).

Going further in this line of interpretation, the public policies that incorporate the so-called *sizable values* should be based on other units of measurement, for example, considering the current amount of rehabilitation in the schools so that effective policies aimed at the health of workers could be implemented. It is necessary to readapt the work in the schools, by modifying the work conditions that cause illness, and this obviously includes better salaries for the workers and other actions to reduce the days off, sick leaves and early retirement due to a health problem.

In summary, under the current logic of labor management in the public schools – logic that comes from the current State model –, the economic rationality should be committed to reduce the number of workers getting ill and away from the schools. The aforementioned

studies (BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003; NUNES, 2000) about the situation of school labor reveal that rehabilitation has largely increased in the first 5 years of service, and are mainly associated with orthopedics, in the case of lunch ladies and helpers, and with otorhinolaryngology, in the case of teachers. Under a quantifiable logic, this represents big losses for the State.

It is also necessary to take a look at other social and economic effects resulting from a public health policy intended for workers which are those associated with ensuring rights for those who get sick, for those who go through rehab because they can no longer stand the malaise caused by the labor organization process, as proposes one interviewee:

People do not resign when being disrespected. For example, the time for retirement for those who go through rehab is a struggle that we are now trying to fight. Rehabilitation has to be characterized as a labor illness, so that the worker will not lose his/her right to retirement. (Worker S)

This is work overload... Today, we frequently see 50 students in a classroom.

Other government policies were mentioned as stress-generating factors which affect the health of school workers. For example: the policy of automatic promotion and the system of cycles, which, generally speaking, allow for a new form of organization of the school teaching, not graded and different from the traditional system in which a student passes or fails in the end of each grade. Linked to this conception is the belief that everyone may learn if they are provided with adequate conditions and resources for learning, and if the learning pace of students is respected (BERTAGNA, 2008).

The interviewees' complaints are not about the pedagogical proposals but about the working conditions under which they are performed. They refer mainly to the

overcrowded classes, which prevents a work of quality from being done. For Bertagna (2008), it is necessary to enhance the discussions about school organization – as the system of cycles and automatic promotion is an example of – and make sure that not only structural and physical conditions are provided, but also that room for collective discussion is made in order to critically analyze the several concepts present in the everyday life of schools.

According to the education workers, one must consider that the follow-up and evaluation of students proposed by such policies are performed on an individual basis, with a record for each case, and this generates a work overload due to the requirement of filling out specific reports, in addition to endless class diaries.

One thing that we do perceive it the teachers are not against the cycles as a matter of principle. Most teachers has already some knowledge of the policy of cycles adopted in other cities. What people do question is the way this policy has been implemented, with an incredible amount of students. Because there is no way you can do a work in cycles in class with 50 students – you can do it in a class of 20. The issue now is the reports that are being demanded... You're supposed to do a report for every student individually. It comes within the class diary, about 50 pages; for each student you have to write something, no matter if it is just a phrase, one line, you got to have some record about the student. Then, I mean, this is an overload of work, the class diary which is not something new, it existed since tat time. (Trabalhador T)

Policies do not take into consideration the conditions under which they are carried out, they do not consider the real work, they take the chance of producing effects that are incompatible with the idea of a responsible public management, as is the case of the students that go through the policy of automatic promotion.

Despite the controversy found in the literature about this issue (TURA; MARCONDES, 2011; GLÓRIA, 2003; ARROYO, 1999), according to the interviewees, many of these students get to senior high-school without mastering basic skills such as reading and writing. This results in an intermittent framework in which the student loses his/her interest in the classes, becomes undisciplined ado and teachers feel tired and dissatisfied. For Gadotti (2003), the problem with the proposal of cycles, in the first place, is the arrogance of its decrees, the authoritarianism with which it is sometimes implemented. It is a structural and cultural reform of schools, and its implementation will not be successful without a change in such culture. Therefore, it is necessary to involve teachers in its conception and inception. In addition, the author says that analyzing the problems associated with the teaching/learning process needs to consider the working conditions of most public schools in Brazil. Gadotti (2003) observes the fact that the teacher, due to the insecurity of the school work, does not manage to do anything else but to fulfill, honestly, the contents and the discipline. Thus, the working conditions are also perceived by workers as a reason for the fall in the quality of education:

The conditions... Today, you have more students in a classroom; today, it is common to find 50 students in a class and the discipline of students also changed a lot; today, you have students getting to the second part of junior high-school who can barely read and write. The student is there, in front of letters he or she doesn't understand completely; maps he or she cannot utilize as a tool. So what? How can you get the student's attention to your class? This has affected the discipline. Reduced quality and automatic promotion have impacted a lot the daily relationship with the teacher, between the students, the inspectors, with the employees. (Trabalhador T)

[...] outsourcing became something very weird in a school.

Another policy carried out by the current model of public management and mentioned by the workers concerns the outsourcing of school services and affects mainly the group of helpers and lunch ladies in Rio de Janeiro. Outsourced employees suffer in higher scale the effects of hierarchy, besides not having the right to some historic achievements of public servants, such as stability. Certainly, the insecurity and lack of assurance are structural characteristics of the present-day world of labor, which tends to turn class solidarity even more difficult. For Alves (2000), the outsourcing process has an importante – and strategic – dimension, as it fragments the worker's collective force by weakening their organization and power of resistance.

Some accounts point to reversals in public administration, as it the case of *sponsorship procedures* in the hiring of acquaintances, which causes distortions in the tasks performed by outsourced workers and relationship problems.

Because outsourcing became something very weird in the school; not for us, as we welcome our outsourced comrades in good will, but they fulfill a task that goes far beyond their job; they are *the eye of the school managers*. (Worker A)

Currently, the outsourcing in the schools reaches the segment of helpers in higher proportion. One finds that in the everyday life the difference of labor bonds among the educational workers divides and isolates the outsourced employees from those who are steady civil servants. Due to outsourcing, everything becomes precarious. A worker working under precarious conditions is in uncertain borderline between occupation and non occupation, without social rights and guarantees. It is a process that makes the whole

process of living insecure, because of the fear and the malaise in the workplace (VASAPOLLO, 2006). Outsourcing is considered an alternative choice by public managers who wish to reduce the lack of employees in the schools; it is a characteristic feature of the de-regulation of labor and the new conceptions of the capitalist organization of the State.

Final comments

Based on the data obtained through the interviews, we found how much the governmental policies and measures that are developed in the sphere of education may determinant of the current health conditions of the educational workers, in addition to serving as obstacles to the implementation of changes. It is necessary to acknowledge that, in the absence of a (comprehensive) policy for the appreciation of education workers, there is another (little) *policy* in the micro-cosmos of labor activities; if on one hand it allows the work to get done, on the other hand it may contribute to reproduce power and domination. The high frequency of absent days and (informais) deals between the school and the workers always benefits those who *get the graces* and the sympathy granted by the school managers. Thus, conceding days of absence (missing days) is seen as a “gift” by those in charge of the school management. This scenario shows that in countless cases, off-the-records, of absence from work due to a health reason need to gain visibility, become an object of study, but with the active participation of workers. It is necessary to publicize the context in which education professionals miss work, a context that cause illness and in which one is no longer capable of working. Thus it is necessary to acknowledge not the *missing worker*, but a work that *misses the point* in fulfilling his/her needs.

In Brazil, there is a century-old tradition, marked by institutions of excluding and clientelist nature, that is embodied in the

practice of “non-political policy in school education” (CURY, 2002, p. 152). One finds the lack of the State as the maker of policies suitable to the reality of the educational problems and workers.

By means of the interviews, we realized that getting to know the problems and sharing the ways to overcome them is indispensable if we are to dive into an in-depth discussion about management, both macro and micro, of the school labor. To be more accurate, it is necessary a set of measures aimed at changing the framework of education workers’ health, such as: inception of programs to generate direct actions in the school workplaces; reviewing the legislation that, on one hand, imposes overload to low and precarious salaries and, on the other hand, it *punishes* workers when they get ill; capacity-building of professionals serving in the medical examination teams so that a more humane service is provided, in a perspective of collective health supported by the knowledge of the real school labor done in the schools; and also to devise and conduct

studies that will yield new data in this field. In turn, these measures should supply elements for the making of government policies aimed at the resolution of real and urgent problems that have an effect on to the workplace.

It is important to remember that the interviews in this study are school workers who are involved in critical debates about the subject, both as a result of having participated in the training program in health, gender and labor in the schools (BRITO; ATHAYDE, 2003), and for performing trade-union activities at the moment when the research was being conducted. Therefore, a question remains to be the basis for new lines of investigation on this issue: what a workers without the characteristics of this group would possibly say?

Finally, we insist on the necessary approach between workers (and their organizations) and managers as a fundamental procedure to change this state of things, and it is indispensable to hear the voice of those who feel and know the problems of education in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

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