

# Towards a decolonial didactics: epistemology and contradictions

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## Abstract

This research was carried out in 2019 and aimed to answer the question: what is the didactics for the public elementary school in such adverse times? The methodology used was the bilan de savoir, in its critical and participatory perspective, with 150 public school teachers, three hundred questionnaires, three interviews, two dialogue groups and a visit to two public schools guided by teachers. After double triangulation and collective interpretations, it was proven that the data provide evidence that didactics is associated with the teaching phenomenon, but that, however, the understanding and practice of this phenomenon crystallize as dissonant activities and disconnected from the needs and urgencies of the present moment. The work identifies six components of this dissonance as internal contradictions and recommends that training courses insist on the presence of didactics in a decolonial conception and on practices that seek to teach the teaching practice to future teachers. The contradictions found were: 1. The pedagogical contradiction: a teaching theory or a formation theory? 2. The ontological contradiction: does teaching require vertical or participatory relationships? 3. The practical contradiction: didactics that want to teach versus didactics that cannot teach. 4. The epistemic contradiction: the student does not want to learn; the teacher cannot teach; the teacher wants to teach, the student cannot learn. 5. Conceptual contradiction: the teacher who teaches? The student who learns? 6. Ethical contradiction: while teaching, in my way, in my manner, I exclude people; I exclude students.

## Keywords

Didactics – Decolonization – Teacher training – Public school.

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## Introduction

The fundamental cause of the development of phenomena is not external but internal; it resides in the contradictory within the phenomena themselves. (TSÉ-TUNG, 2008, p. 86).

In this text, I share some results of a survey<sup>2</sup> that had the proposal to answer: what is the didactic for the public elementary school in such adverse times? Where is didactics in public school?

I considered that a research in this direction would be relevant, as long as I, as a researcher, managed to understand the perspective of the current teacher of today's public school, beyond the discourses already posted and the results already perceived in previous works.

The proposal was done so that I consider the current times, in the perspective of their adversity. Thus, my initial concerns focused on the methodological issue and the issue of temporal context. The method should provoke a reflection in the professors who would be part of the research and produce their participation both in the perspective of providing reflection data and in helping to read the current school and interpret the reflections of other participants. Regarding the adverse historical time, it was necessary to go back a little in time and problematize some moments that demarcated perceptible signs in the senses of school.

In the final decades of the last century, I was a principal in a public school. This experience helped me, in my research, to identify the times and complex intricacies that permeate a social institution, in this case, the public school. This situation made me reflect: were there better times for public school than these? Less complex times? What characterizes the complexity of the current times?

Deepening the look, I considered that each historical time follows a specific logic, because it is conceptually organized by individuals conditioned in temporal subjectivities; however, the current time becomes more cruel when it is organized around the neoliberal logic, in the contours of the supremacy of the financial market and to the detriment of humanist perspectives and values of solidarity and the individual's participation in the direction of the society in which he lives. This consideration leads me to reinforce Mia Couto's speech: "we don't need more time. We need our time!" (verbal information)<sup>3</sup>.

The writer wanted to alert us that the fundamental is the individual's role in signifying his time, that is, in perceiving things in the meaning of his time. I think that it is very uncomfortable to perceive oneself as little autonomous in understanding that the historical meanings that we attribute to phenomena that surround us come to be

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**2-** The data supporting the results are not fully publicly available, only the synthesis, as appropriate to the methodological proposal. For those who want more details can request them through my academic email.

**3-** Speech given by Mia Couto at the conference cycle *Frontiers of thought* in Florianópolis, in August 2014.

reinterpreted, by others, in an abrupt, invasive or non-conceptual way. There are many examples, but I emphasize the issue of school. What is the role of the current school? Is it to transmit the subject or to educate individuals? We realize that, for the neoliberal logic, the school is to transmit information and no longer to educate students. This situation of discomfort about the meaning of school arbitrarily moves us from our own time. This does not mean to despise the idea that everything is in permanent transformation; the very meaning of school is! However, it is expected that individuals who have lived and studied the school perceive themselves as participants in the transformations that occur in its meanings and those that need to occur.

Finally, for this work, I considered that adverse times would be considered as times of little autonomy for the individual in terms of signifying his historical time; I also considered that adverse times are undemocratic, authoritarian times, of mass responses, of few possibilities to invent our own time.

Looking back, I analyzed that, in the final decades of the last century, critical-reproductive theories were fundamental for understanding the school. I bring to this text some historical counterpoints to realize that the moment after the dictatorships in Europe and Brazil<sup>4</sup>, seem to have produced profound resignifications in the sense of public school. Thus, the objectives of this article are: a) to consider some theoretical-historical counterpoints that help to understand the current context of public schools in Brazil; b) explain the methodology of the work that allowed identifying some meanings of the relationship between public school teachers and didactic knowledge; c) analyze the necessary components to understand the internal contradiction of the didactic phenomenon; and d) propose decolonial didactics as a form of resistance and recreation of democratic practices in public schools.

## **Times of public school**

The Brazilian public school bears deep marks of Jesuit education. Its presence predominated in Brazil for 149 years, from 1549 until the expulsion of the Society of Jesus, by Marquês de Pombal, in 1759, following the perspective of the political-economic project of Portugal.

However, even after the expulsion of the Jesuits, the pedagogical situation changed little, as teaching continued to be elitist, encyclopedic, with purposes of mere illustration and good memorization and with authoritarian and disciplinary pedagogical methods, which ended up developing in students passivity, submission to authorities and outdated models. The Pombaline reforms, therefore, seem to have merely removed the public education from the power of the Church, passing it on to the State, in the perspective of free and secular education.

The pedagogical roots of the encyclopedic teaching, based on memorization and repetition of ready-made formulas, little creative and little problem-solving, persist and, to this day, are present in the imaginary of a large part of the population, as being the

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**4-** Around the 1970s and 1980s; after the dictatorships of Salazar (1974) and Franco (1975), in Portugal and Spain, respectively; and in Brazil (1985); in addition to the rise of the French socialist regime (1978).

educational practice itself, in the assumption of its neutrality. Despite the efforts of the Society of Jesus to catechize the Indians and the poor people, its education was focused on educating the ruling elites; this elitist character is another strong root of Brazilian public education.

The 1920s produced the decline of oligarchies, so firmly established on Brazilian soil, due to the crisis of the agricultural-commercial-export model and the impulse to industrialization as a national-developmental model. The bourgeois class gained prominence and strengthened itself as economic power and social expectation. The fall of the oligarchy and the rise of the industrial bourgeoisie, combined with the emerging political and cultural transformations, the world wars, the 1930 Revolution, the Tenentismo, the presence of the Communist Party, the Week of Modern Art and the philosophical lines of thought of the New Schools and of the Catholics, will be incorporated into education and will influence the school organization in this period.

It is always worth remembering that, until the 1930s, there was no requirement for specific education or prerequisites for the professional practice of teaching in secondary education, only a few exams performed by people who had graduated from any higher education course.

Despite the New Education movement (1932) and more democratic perspectives for education, it was still a public education for a few, with limited teacher training and very traditional pedagogical methods, based on instrumental and technical didactics that had the objective of the transmission of content previously selected by political leaders.

Thus, in the 1950s and 1960s, the public education system was available to only 35 percent of the population, which primarily served the middle class in large cities and the economic elite. This school was already benefiting from the results of investments in teacher training; perhaps for this reason the public school of this period is widely remembered as a school of excellent quality<sup>5</sup>.

Contrary to this elitist and excluding school, one could already see the critical presence of the roots of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1984) in Northeastern Brazil. In those times, the author expressed himself as follows: "it is necessary to disclose the previous order that structures the society; it is essential that each individual learns to identify their social place, so that from this place they can grasp the logic of domestication that the social system imposes" (FREIRE, 1984, p. 32).

The emerging public school in the 1950s and 1960s, of relative pedagogical quality, was undergoing a growing adjustment, especially due to the new requirements for teacher training and the studies and research that were beginning to understand the educational phenomenon and that were taking place in the then recent public universities, with emphasis on the University of São Paulo (USP), in São Paulo, the University of the Federal District (UDF), which would become the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ), in Rio de Janeiro, in addition to the strength source of the National Institute of Pedagogical Studies (Inep) of the Ministry of Education and Culture – currently the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira –, under the presidency of Anísio

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**5-** See, among other studies, that by Maria Luíza Marcílio (2014).

Teixeira. In 1971, according to the document *Analysis of the current situation of INEP and proposal to reformulate its structure and objectives*, by Inep,

The functions of the National Institute of Pedagogical Studies should gain greater amplitude, seeking to become, as much as possible, the inspiration center of the national teaching, for the formation of that common educational conscience which, more than any other force, should direct and guide the Brazilian school. INEP's studies should help the emergence of this movement of national consciousness that is essential for school reconstruction. (BRASIL, 1971, p. 10).

This hopeful path of education, with research and studies on and for teacher training, was soon to suffer a major setback on account of the Military Dictatorship, in 1964, which ended up crushing and destroying the process that generated new roots in Brazilian education, either by the development of research in universities and research centers, or by Paulo Freire's initial proposals against banking education and in favor of a broad literacy process for adults. An inflection point, time wasted experience; time to rewind. That was the period of the dictatorship, from 1964 to 1985.

From 1964 to 1985, there was a deepening of technical pedagogical practices, instrumental didactics and the domesticating teaching of thought. As a result, we see an impoverishment of pedagogical thinking and we see that public schools, teachers and educators are losing the social ethos of belonging to the society, dignity and commitment. There was a false universalization of education, since only the space for entering the school was universalized, which in turn no longer had the possibility of adequately educating its students.

However, resistance was generated and one of the good consequences, perhaps, was the perception, by teachers, of the political role of education. This feeling was materialized by and in the political movements of didactics, expressed largely in the epistemological turn of didactics, expressed in Vera Candau's books still at the end of the dictatorship, in the 1980s, among which figures *Didactics in question* (1984). The researchers, many professors, were on the alert and in a political process of resistance<sup>6</sup>. Thus, when it was possible to read Brazilian education again, it was possible to count on new explanatory theories of public school. Thus, it is important to focus, in this analysis on public school, that critical-reproductive theories (CRT) were fundamental for understanding and reviewing the political and social role of didactics.

## **Critical Reproductive Theories (CCT)**

Appearing in France between the 1960s and 1970s, the CRT were a great movement of researchers who absorbed the reproductive theses and started to research the mechanisms that allowed the school to serve capitalist interests and produce sneaky,

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**6-** In the 1980s, the National Association of Education (Anede), the Center for Education and Society Studies (Cedes) and the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Education (Anped), created respectively in 1977, 1978 and 1979.

disguised practices, which made their presence difficult, the permanence and performance of the popular classes at school (CHARLOT, 2013).

There was great merit in the studies resulting from these theories, which gave theoretical support to the critique of a technical pedagogy, subservient to the purposes of economic logic. Through this theoretical support, the myth that the school was the redeemer of the popular class and that, through it, the working class could ascend socially can be tensioned. The movement made clear the concept that the school, as it was, served to endorse and maintain social inequalities<sup>7</sup>.

Such studies highlighted how the practices used by schools to produce discipline, respect for hierarchy, submission, unique truths, uniformity of behavior and postures were, in reality, practices that oppressed, especially, the popular class and that they disguised, under the discourse of equanimity, its oppressive character. Everything seemed well naturalized and, therefore, the child from the popular class, who did not have the same cultural capital as students from other social classes, had to submit to the logic of a school that was built for the logic of domination, reducing the possibilities of popular social class to find the same success as the students who already circulated in the same literate logic and who had the cultural capital adequate to the school demands.

Finally, the school mechanisms that perpetuate the inequalities that materialize in the school environment became, through reproductive theories, more explicit, clarifying practices of equality simulation in which equal treatment was applied to different children (BAUDELLOT; ESTABLET, 1987). Thus, these theories helped to produce a new understanding of the role of the school as the ideological apparatus of the State.

According to Althusser (1970), a researcher of these reproductive theses, the school constitutes one of the main ideological apparatuses of the State, as it functioned as a regulator and controller of the masses, with school practices being responsible for preparing the workforce for the industries, consummating the ideology of the dominant upper bourgeoisie. However, the author emphasizes that the school is not the only Ideological Apparatus of the State (IAE), as there are the church, the family, the various political and legal institutions:

All the ideological apparatuses of the State concur for the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, that is, of the relations of capitalist exploitation. Each one of them contributes to this result in a way that is its own, that is, by submitting (subjecting) individuals to an ideology. (ALTHUSSER, 1970, p. 32).

These theories were important for understanding the mechanisms that shape the social dynamics of schools; however, such theories also produced a certain pessimism in relation to the school, as they did not consider the dialectical movement within school spaces, proposing a rather functionalist look in its understanding.

Time has shown that it is necessary to relativize the influence of the repression mechanisms triggered by the IAEs. If studies demonstrated this perspective, other studies

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**7-** For a more in-depth analysis of these theories, see: Althusser (1983), Bourdieu and Passeron (1992), among others.

also show that not everything happens in a single direction. There are always reactions and resistances. Charlot's study (1997, 2005) on school failure and students' relationships with knowledge indicates that there are other mechanisms that can explain the difficulties of the popular class to succeed in the educational practices developed there.

It is important to emphasize that such theories disregarded the conflicts within the school space, the perennial contradictions that emerge in it, and failed to shed light on the resistances that necessarily arise in the life-spaces of school dynamics. However, they allowed to know the mechanisms that hide the ideological inculcation and allowed advances in cultural studies, especially studies in the curriculum area<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, reproductive theses, at the same time that they produced fissures in subjectivities regarding the redeeming role of the school, brought other interpretations to critical theory, demonstrating the real possibility of using the school as a regulatory apparatus of the State, expressing well the concept of Chauí (2016) about a masked, disguised ideology. Thus, it was possible to better understand the phenomenon of cultural domination, well analyzed by Adorno (especially when discussing the ideologization of the cultural capital); and these understandings propitiated new studies of critical pedagogy, even, I dare say, new understandings of Freire's theory itself.

## The deterritorialized school

Among crises and tensions, the public school begins to be reinterpreted and there is a loss and transfiguration of the meaning that the middle class and the elite began to attribute to this public space for education. The lack of investment in schools; the precarious training of teachers that occurred, especially during the period of the dictatorship; and the protest movements of teachers, in the form of strikes, which were necessary to try to achieve better conditions in public schools, impacted their social valuation. Gradually, lesser adhesion to the public school project and successive transference of students from public schools to private schools is noticed, under the misunderstanding that better formation would be done there. To better understand, "of the 27,500,000 children enrolled in primary schools across the country (1989), 87.5% attended free public schools, supported by tax revenue" (GOLDEMBERG, 1993, p. 3). It is always necessary to invest in public, secular and free schools for all. What happened, quite significantly, was the loss of power and significance of the importance of public school. There is little visibility of its importance, its voice is little recognized; its cause, devalued.

Data from the 2018 Census show that the public network of schools in Brazil is still very large and that 77 percent of elementary school students are in public schools. However, the public school is gradually becoming a school for the poor people, as Libâneo (2012, p. 19) clearly explains:

[...] the school that is left over for the poor people, characterized by its care and welcoming missions (included in the expression inclusive education), becomes a caricature of social

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**8-** See also: Bowles and Gintis (1976), in addition to studies by authors linked to the Frankfurt School, especially Habermas and Adorno.

inclusion. The universalization access policies end up at the loss of the quality of education, as, while rates of access to school are proclaimed, social inequalities in access to knowledge are aggravated, including within the school, due to the impact of intra-school factors on learning.

The remaining school has no voice, no representation, it has become a space only for the transmission of poor information. A space without life, without conditions to be emancipatory, especially for the culturally disadvantaged. It is necessary to be realistic to say that didactics, alone, will not have the strength to transform this school and that the school, in turn, will not have the strength to, alone, change society.

It will be necessary for the collective of educators, focused on the possibility of making the teaching praxis revolutionary, from an epistemological and political point of view, to act in a “radical, rigorous and collective” way<sup>9</sup>. Therefore, in this text, I want to bring research results in which some analyses are revealed about the conditions of teacher education that need to be incorporated into the training processes, from the perspective of a new thinking about the phenomenon of teaching in a critical and decolonizing way.

It is necessary, somehow, to save the school from the fury of capitalism because, as Rolnik writes (2019, p. 4), “the capitalism is managing to colonize the whole of the planet”, to then emphasize that, in this regime, we are no longer able to recognize ourselves in our collective experience as individuals.

The aforementioned author, who is a psychoanalyst, warns us that this situation shapes and colonizes our desires in a way that we are not always aware of how much we are being oppressed by a colonization logic that obstructs our perspective for the future. The research I bring in this text carries data that seem to confirm that our schools are colonized by discourses and powers that are alien to their epistemological dimension.

In this way, I bring as a perspective the proposal for the decolonization of didactics, in the same direction as Ballestrin (2013, p. 105) states about the need for “another thought; perhaps a new theory, or another episteme” that leverages a “decolonial turn”. I pursue this turn to enhance the possibilities of didactics to lead and support teaching practices in these adverse times.

I can say that, in my approach to the feelings and thoughts of the public elementary school teacher in this research, I could see that the individual does not always feel entangled in a productivist, superficial, colonized logic. I identified many lines that can be summarized as follows: it is really good if I receive a script of what I have to teach in the classroom, so I don't need to spend time thinking! Without much reflection, but convinced, many teachers say: this way (with a script) it is easier to transmit the class!

### **Research methodology:** from *bilan de savoir* to collective critical listening

Considering previous studies on the necessary participation of individuals, either in data collection or in their interpretation (FRANCO, 2005, 2012), considering the possibilities of fallacies in the participation of the individuals (STRECK, 2017) and recent

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<sup>9</sup>- As Saviani (1996, p. 20) refers to the necessary philosophical reflection.



studies that alert to the place of speech (RIBEIRO, 2019), I was quite concerned about capturing the true feelings and the conceptions of the teachers in relation to didactics and understanding how they perceived the possibilities and the presence of didactics in their teaching spaces in public schools.

Among the collaborative methodological possibilities for such investigative moment, I thought that the ideal would be to use the *bilan de savoir* as a method of collecting data, which allows obtaining answers without asking questions. This is because, according to Charlot (1999), whoever asks always induces the determination of the field of the answer, even without realizing it.

The *bilan de savoir*, as a methodological instrument, seeks to create an atmosphere in which the interviewee tries to declare what he feels and thinks; however, being in the school environment itself, feeling and thinking can be expressed to meet the expectation that it assumes to be the school's (CHARLOT; BAUTIER; ROCHEX, 1992).

Great care is needed since, according to the authors, this is always a discourse in a situation. In this way, it is necessary to avoid inducing the pertinence field of the answer, which would cause a serious bias when the researcher is interested in the meaning given by the respondent (CHARLOT; BAUTIER; ROCHEX, 1992). The authors emphasize that it is not possible, for example, to suggest that the school should serve for something if the objective of data collection is to know what meaning the person gives to the school.

One of the big questions in the *bilan de savoir* is to identify a question, or a script of questions, which produces a reflection on the individual beyond the ready-made answers that he would normally have. As Kalali (2007, p. 18, our translation) states, "From the individuals' perspective, the relationship with knowledge is similar to a process of self-training, revealing the individual's subjectivity and reflexivity".

Considering the care taken with the question to be asked, the method becomes participatory and mobilizes the mechanisms of search for meaning. Thus, after several reflections and interlocutions, I defined the following initial question to be asked to the teachers: when I read or hear the word "didactics", or things related to didactics, my reaction is to think that...

Thus, it is assumed that the respondent can give a less programmed answer than, for example, if he were asked something like: what is the importance of didactics for his practice? Because, in this case, I (researcher) would already be assuming the importance of the didactic phenomenon; in addition, the teacher could resort to responses previously elaborated by other people's speeches.

At first, the teachers wrote narratives based on the question posed above. After analyzing these narratives and understood as latent meanings to the issue, in this case, of didactics, it was possible to structure axes of meanings that served as guides for unstructured, well-open interviews, approaching a pedagogical listening. The senses were refined and evidenced. Collectively analyzed from the perspective of critical hermeneutics, they provided the guiding thread for the meanings expressed in the process of understanding the meaning that teachers attribute to didactics.

After the filter of the first question - When I read or hear the word "didactics", or things related to didactics, my reaction is to think that... -, others emerged and corresponded to the second phase: 1) When I look around my work space at the public school, I notice

the presence of didactics...; 2) In my professional career as a teacher, I feel that didactics can help me in... can help me with...; and 3) I think teaching is...

Note that the question is an open statement, on a blank sheet, so that the individuals can express the lines they want, their own narratives.

It should be noted that the *bilan de savoir* is a critical-dialectical process that is structured in the form of expressive speeches that intersect and complement each other. Charlot (2001, p. 92, our translation) states that “the relationship with knowledge is expressed in the form of a discourse, by formulation and not by a for or against, as in a polling [...] a good *bilan de savoir* is difficult to do, because it assumes a good relationship with knowledge”.

I worked with six auxiliary researchers, who performed the data collection in: Rio de Janeiro, Duque de Caxias, São Paulo, Santos, Aparecida do Norte, Registro and Juazeiro do Norte<sup>10</sup>. In all, 150 people were interviewed based on the guiding meaning questions, previously elaborated, according to the previous paragraph. The analysis of the collected data was carried out by myself and three of the researchers.

After the data collection and analysis, dialogic conversations of critical listening were held with three teachers from public schools, one from Santos and two from Campinas, two cities in the state of São Paulo. In addition, I took a pedagogical tour of a public school, accompanied by a teacher who had already retired from that school and a beginning teacher.

All data were analyzed from the perspective of critical hermeneutics, according to Thouard (2002) and Franco (2012).

## **Empirical data**

For this text, I will list just a few basic pieces of data that I consider essential to develop a constructive analysis of some knowledge in relation to didactics.

The work of transforming empirical data into concrete data is long and requires a lot of dialogue, either with theory or with the individuals of the practice.

I tried, whenever possible, to call research participants and other people from the same social and/or professional place as the research individuals to find strange and recognize the data, towards the construction of knowledge: look at the data; listen to circumstances and contexts; try to understand and seek to interpret, then pull and weave threads of collective understanding and thus generate an approximation with the creation of knowledge.

From the question when I read or hear the word “didactics”, or things related to didactics, my reaction is to think that... we could identify that the answers were linked to the perception of the act of teaching, which I prefer to call the phenomenon of teaching. The most frequent answers revolved around the “didactic and teaching” axis:

### 1) I think about the possibilities of teaching

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**10-** Cities in Rio de Janeiro, in São Paulo countryside, in Vale do Ribeira, in Baixada Santista (São Paulo Coast), in Fortaleza and in the Brazilian Northeast.

- 2) I always see a teacher teaching
- 3) Didactics, for me, leads me to think about teaching methods
- 4) I think about ways to teach
- 5) I think of a force to guide teaching
- 6) I think about traditional ways of teaching
- 7) I always link it to teaching techniques
- 8) I think about subjects, about teaching content
- 9) Conduct the class
- 10) Teaching method and technique
- 11) Apply methods
- 12) Resources for teaching
- 13) Systematization of teaching
- 14) Transmit knowledge
- 15) How to teach.

Few teachers mentioned student learning, giving the impression that they understand that the teaching process is disconnected from learning; I had the impression that many lines even consider that teaching is independent of learning. Those who remembered learning did it, for the most part, in a very instrumental, banking and strategic way:

- 1) Facilitate (help) student learning (3)
- 2) Transmit the knowledge to the student (6)
- 3) Content transfer (5)
- 4) Get the student's attention (4)
- 5) Make the student pay attention (3).

There are several studies, such as Franco (2008), Franco and Guarnieri (2011), Libâneo (2008), Pimenta, Franco and Libâneo (2010), showing that didactics is absent from the formative processes of future teachers, and this can be perceived in some answers, which I classified as meanings of a disused didactic:

- 1) Concept in disuse (now replaced by methodologies and projects) (1)
- 2) Concept formerly used in traditional school (2)
- 3) Old word, today constructivism is spoken (1)
- 4) Classroom of the former magisterium (2)
- 5) Old teaching (2).

I find this submission of the concept of didactics very interesting to the concept of methodology for future studies and research: the taking of the part by the whole; would it be a sign of neotechnicism in education, impacted by neoliberal training policies, already dominating the subjectivity of teachers? It seems so, since I was able to perceive, during a visit to a public school, in the dialogue with two teachers - one recently retired and the other who started teaching 5 years ago - that the more beginner the teacher, the more he/

she believes in the need for scripting the practice. The young teacher believes that it is necessary to learn the right way to do the class, she talks about the importance of having scripts that guide the course of action; however, the old teacher thinks differently, and verbalizes: little by little we are learning to think in practice, with practice! Everything can help, however, if I don't have pedagogical support, nothing makes sense, no technical guidance works!

In this research, however, I could see that there is a group of these young teachers, around 10%, who believe in and value the concept of the teacher who reflects. And so they respond in relation to the meaning they attribute to the didactic word:

- 1) Reflection on doing
- 2) Ongoing training
- 3) Teach with quality
- 4) Ideology for teaching
- 5) Posture to teach
- 6) Ethics for teaching
- 7) Direction of sense.

These data may be signs of new perspectives and new components in the subjectivities that guide professional practices. But they can also be just poorly internalized discourses, which fail to materialize into new practices. However, if they work as reflexive counterpoints, they will already be important for the dialectical dynamics of reconstructing a concept.

However, new contradictions emerge. When asked where they perceived the presence of didactics in the school where they worked, the concept of organization came to light in a very strong way. Teachers stated that they perceive the presence of didactics at school when planning; to organize exhibitions, fairs and parties; in the organization of the information board; in the organization of infrastructure material; and also in the organization of recreation and recreational activities.

Teachers consider that the organization of materials and events is an activity that demonstrates didactics. Why this answer? Deepening the debate, they say that there is no didactics without organizing and sequencing content. Teachers perceive the presence of didactics in the national curriculum guidelines and in projects that arise from higher bodies to be applied and in the textbooks.

In addition, the teachers stressed that they want didactics. They want it because they need it and they need it to be able to envision a class that has an effect. What would a class like this be? The interviewed teachers know how to answer: a class in which students pay attention and learn. Deepening the reflection a little, I asked: and how do you know that the students learned? It's easy, they answer: it's when they know how to answer the questions from the book, the text or the ones we suggest. In other words, it is a sign that students learn when they give the right answers and don't make a mess, or even when they do it willingly, say the teachers.

Teachers want didactics to teach them techniques for disciplining students; to make them copy the task from the board or the book; to answer the questions in the lesson. For this, they imagine that didactics can offer content sequencing rules; steps to divide the

class into listening and doing times; help them organize a class with a beginning, middle and end. They consider that they have not learned, in their degree courses, to teach a class. They even learned to plan, but they can't deliver the planned class. Students are not quiet, and this, according to them, interferes with the schedule.

They want didactics to make students apathetic; that removes the contradictions between thinking and doing from the room; they want an environment for students to receive the class, because only then, they say, will they be able to transmit everything that needs to be transmitted. Unfortunately, this is the verb I hear very often among teachers: transmit the class; transmit content; transmit ways of thinking.

When some feel that they need to reflect, they often want to reflect on the best way to transmit. This is also why they want didactics to provide them with strategies to overcome these inconveniences in the classroom, that is, students who do not pay attention; that don't stop; who don't do the lessons.

They really want the didactics to teach them to review the practice; to complete their training; to reflect on the problems; namely selecting contents.

They believe that didactics can save the school without infrastructure; to recompose the teaching team; to overcome the difficulties of a room with many students; to overcome an incipient pedagogical training.

I think there is something magical, or naive, about that thought. However, when I insisted that teachers indicate suggestions for didactics, I noticed a greater criticality. They state that they do not perceive clarity in the conception of teaching methods as they exist in the textbooks they read or even in the books they have already read. They consider that didactics could offer them theories and principles to better understand students, social and cognitive contexts. And more than that: how to work with different contexts in the same classroom, how to articulate and share meanings of life and the world.

They ask that didactics answer their pedagogical questions: how to create meaning and desire to learn in students? How to work on the real formation of students beyond the pressure of external assessments? How can the teacher make sense of their own teaching practices? How can didactics help the teacher to organize thoughts? Identifying the pedagogical bases of his work? They ask: what answers can didactics offer us?

### **Observing the school space: where is didactics?**

I entered two schools accompanied by two teachers: one active and one who had just retired. I wanted to recognize today's public school through the eyes of the teachers. I tried to find strange and rediscover the school of today, different from the one where I was principal decades ago.

I noticed the effort to organize the space, an aspect valued by both. They showed me the billboards and the dirty walls, some graffiti, some drawings and lots of peeling walls. But nothing scary, just lack of ongoing maintenance. After all, they are schools located in working-class neighborhoods. I also noticed the effort to discipline the school: messages, notifications, some inspectors and servants in a lot of action.

The principal in a closed room, I didn't even introduce myself: it was the end of the year, and the work was huge. I talked to some teachers, they were at the exam time. They don't say evaluation time, but tests.

In every room there were blackboards, frayed erasers, and white chalk.

There are timetables throughout the school signaling classes and rooms, entrances and exits, rites, and there are attendance books. A similar atmosphere was exposed by Candau (2016, p. 351-352) with precision:

[...] "adaptation to the hegemonic and monocultural norms of 'right, correct, acceptable and good'; classroom, generally with the same layout (students in a row, blackboard/green/white in front, etc.); seriation-hierarchization of school subjects; in general panels at the service of the organization and school management; little student participation in building the panels and decorating the school.

In the teachers' room, during a break, I noticed an atmosphere of work, tiredness and a certain disbelief in the public school. Thoughts expressed in lines such as: this is hopeless! Nobody is interested in public school! Here only circulate the social class that cannot pay.

I didn't find laughter, signs of joy, or fun activities. Everything looked dull and very serious. I could write: aridity of physical space, not pleasant.

Taking advantage of a group of teachers in the room assigned to them, I asked: what is didactics for? The almost unanimous answer was: to improve teaching! If it is to improve teaching, what is teaching then? I found varied answers around the transmission of knowledge, transmission of content, transmission of information and class organization.

I then asked: if you organize your class well, will the teaching be good? Some responded: it is up to the students to let the class be exposed; if the students are quiet I can talk without problems and the class will be good.

I got the impression that the feeling is that students disrupt the class, that a class without students would be adequate. I talked to them about it and they replied that without discipline it is impossible for a class to be good.

### **An internal contradiction: didactics as a theory of teaching? Didactics as a theory of training?**

The big question that came up was that of thinking about a new research: how has didactic theory, worked on teacher training courses, interpreted the nature of the teaching phenomenon? How have institutional practices produced the meaning of teaching? How have public assessment policies considered the phenomenon of teaching?

I believe that our schools depend on how the teaching process is interpreted, both in the subjectivities of the social actors and in public policies, and even more in institutional school practices.

Kincheloe (1996) analyzes that knowledge can be built in students if, and only if, information from subjects intersects with the understandings and experiences that individuals carry with them to school. Thus, the author considers it essential that the

contemporary teacher is trained in order to know how to help students reinterpret their own lives and discover new talents as a result of their encounter with school knowledge.

This conception of cognition as a knowledge process portends a profound pedagogical change. It will be necessary for didactics to navigate this perspective in order to overcome the trivialization of learning in school processes. It is urgently necessary to overcome the conception of transmission of information or even knowledge when we talk about the teaching process.

Since Paulo Freire and the origin of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, there has been a pedagogical consensus around the non-banking education, not just transmissive, non-domesticating the individual who learns. But there is still, in today's world, a strong understanding that teaching means transmitting something to an empty head, to an ahistorical individual.

Didactics, as a teaching theory, needs to continue insisting on the understanding that there is no teaching outside the interpreting individual. In this perspective, all teaching will always be a training process, which leads to self-training, which reinterprets convictions and updates conceptions of the world.

## **Didactics and teaching: contradictions**

Through double triangulations in the categories of analysis, it was possible to glimpse at least five internal contradictions that historically permeate the concept of didactics:

1. The pedagogical contradiction: a teaching theory or a training theory?
2. The ontological contradiction: does teaching require vertical or participatory relationships?
3. The practical contradiction: didactics that want to teach versus didactics that cannot teach.
4. The epistemic contradiction: the student does not want to learn; the teacher cannot teach; the teacher wants to teach, the student cannot learn.
5. The conceptual contradiction: the teacher who teaches? The student who learns? Learning/teaching itself.
6. The ethical contradiction: while teaching, in my way, in my manner, I exclude people; I exclude students.

These contradictions cannot be explained in the scope of this article, however I want to emphasize the importance of identifying these contradictions, in order to allow for a further step in the understanding of the theory and teaching practice.

The sense of contradiction expressed here is linked to the thought of Mao Tsé-Tung (2008)<sup>11</sup>, who warns that the fundamental contradiction in the process of developing something is always on the way:

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**11-** Rewritten by Žižek (*apud* TSÉ-TUNG, 2008).

The fundamental contradiction in the process of developing a thing and the essence of the process determined by that fundamental contradiction will not disappear until the process is complete; but, in a long process, conditions generally differ at each stage. [...] The fundamental contradiction becomes more and more intensified as it moves from one stage to another in the prolonged process. If people do not pay attention to the stages in the process of developing a thing, they cannot correctly deal with its contradictions. (TSÉ-TUNG, 2008, p. 101).

This alert signals to look at the history of the concept since Comenius, and to understand the issues that affect us nowadays, especially the conditions of predominance of the capitalist logic, impregnating and deforming educational practices and the senses placed in the dimension of teaching, a logic that depersonalizes the teacher figure, removes the sense of the school practices and undermines the teacher training.

The market commands the school practice, the senses of the school, the professionalization of the teachers. The result is what we have seen: meaningless schools, school practices emptied of educational crafts and filled with materials that produce profits outside the individuals of the education. In this way, contrary to the nature of education and teaching, contradictions loom large and revolve around itself, ceasing to flow towards its epistemological overcoming.

I was able to identify the contradiction exposed in teachers with good will, who want and like to teach. Many of these, armed with the best will, want very specific scripts to conduct their classes; they want the school to have instruments to control the student behavior; they want the order and passivity; they would like to train students in the right answers; they shy away from innovations and impertinent questions; they long for a didactics that authorizes them to be authoritarian, to use vertical relations of command and obedience and, when they want to dare, active methodologies that train ready answers and encourage memorization.

## **The urgency for decolonial didactics**

The survey data led me to reflect on some mistakes and contradictions that seem to permeate the pedagogical practice of teaching. Among these, I would like to highlight something that seems to be ingrained in the traditional conception of didactics and that continues to reify practices and make changes unfeasible. I realized that the teaching practice of many teachers is built without the necessary articulation between the epistemic and the empirical self. The empirical self always prevails and this perhaps explains the desire of teachers for models, scripts, recipes and teaching strategies. Students are not perceived in their epistemic specificities; thus, these teachers believe that the simple presentation of information and content sets the student's intelligence in motion.

But that is not true. It works for those who already have productive relationships with knowledge, however these are few: there are many colonizations and subjectivations in the epistemic self. The cultural capital brought in by students from different social backgrounds differs greatly; the relationships with school knowledge are always multiple and diverse, as already explained by Charlot (2005). Thus, every teaching process will always be an inclusion process, which requires critical and intercultural didactics. Charlot



(2005, p. 43) reaffirms: “the epistemic self, that is, the individual as a pure subject of knowledge, distinct from the empirical self, is not given; he is built and conquered”.

Now, this achievement is a didactic task. Reinforces Charlot (2005, p. 44): “In fact, the constitution of the epistemic self is not only a condition of the didactic situation, it is also one of its effects [...]”. Who is the subject of learning? What stories and contexts does he bring to school? And, using Ribeiro’s concept (2019), I dare to ask: what is your place of speech? How does the teacher articulate the different places of speech present in the same classroom? How to establish the dialogic practice if we do not understand the different places of speech?

We know that traditional, instrumental didactics was based on the assumption that, in principle, there is already an epistemic self favorable to learning. Therefore, within this logic, it is enough to present good materials and methods, that is, external didactic conditions for learning to take place. To insist on this perspective is to perpetuate the elitism of education. It is to think of a school for those who are already culturally benefited.

Historically, didactics sought the supposed hegemonic speech of modernity. As Mignolo warns (2005, p. 75), “coloniality is constitutive of modernity, not derivative”. Thus, for didactics work as an inclusive and emancipatory practice, it will need to be decolonized. It will be necessary to look for a new didactic epistemology, which results from another pedagogical thought and produces other pedagogical practices.

I emphasize that assuming a new didactic epistemology implies, above all, adopting another pedagogical thinking/doing. As Ballestrin states (2013, p. 105): “‘Another thinking’ – perhaps a ‘other theory’ or ‘other episteme’”. This “decolonial turn” constitutes a “movement of theoretical and practical, political and epistemological resistance to the logic of modernity/coloniality” (BALLESTRIN, 2013, p. 105 italics mine.).

These analyzes lack a depth look at didactics and indicate: the necessary and fundamental presence of didactics in the training processes, a critical, intercultural, multidimensional didactics focused on a new way of considering teaching: decolonized and critical; the need for advanced studies and research in/of didactics with a focus on understanding the contradictions that permeate the nature of the teaching phenomenon, such as that of Cruz (2017), in which the author expresses the need for teaching centered on the public school, in basic education and teaching work; advanced researches that bring new conceptions to the meanings, processes and practices of the teaching process, considering the phenomenon of teaching and its peculiarities, focusing on the practice of teaching education, reframing the teaching process – which means the inclusion of the individual in the interpretation processes of practices; the search for research methodologies that include the other’s knowledge in education, the epistemic self of the student, the articulation of this self with the empirical self; collaborative research that brings the eyes of practitioners in conjunction with the researchers’ assumptions; and the proposal for a decolonial turn to didactics, in an effort to detach itself from its modernist/positivist slurs, in the perspective already put forward by Candau (2016), who has claimed the presence of intercultural, critical and democratic relations in the certainty of a decolonial didactics.

## **Final considerations: reaffirming fundamental principles**

In this research, I sought to find answers to the question: what is the didactics for the basic, public school, in such adverse times? In this investigative process, my reflections focused on some principles through which I interpreted and built some understandings of the question raised.

First, the principle that public school is a condition for exercising and living democratic and universal ideals. As such, it must be considered as a right for all, as a structure for social and political relations and a space-time of plural experience, beyond and below social, cultural and ethical inequalities; a place to recognize, care for, appropriate the cultural heritage of our ancestors. Thus, I emphasize: it is the idea of school, the concept of school, which needs to be restored, in order to provide conditions for the reframing of didactics.

What idea would that be? The conception of a public space, secular, free and of plural coexistence; space for the formation of possibilities, accessible to everyone and with all the conditions to guarantee the co-construction of the knowledge produced, in multiple readings and interpretations that allow each individual to appropriate their conceptions of the world in conjunction with their social group and with the present moment. A school that achieves education and training goals for everyone. A school that alphabetizes for letters, numbers, social and collective attitudes, emotions, solidarity and collective coexistence and sustainability.

Another fundamental principle: education cannot be conceived, treated, understood by the logic of the market. Education is a right and not goods. As a right, it must be public, secular and mandatory. As a duty, it is necessary to include everyone and offer mechanisms, processes and agencies so that everyone has in the school space the conditions to live well and develop their right to citizenship.

The school must coordinate to organize an educational project, with pedagogical practices that allow the emancipation of the individuals, unmasking projects of cultural domination that, dressed up as naturalness and neutrality, prevent the full experience of fundamental rights and produce a unique reading of the world. The different places of speech need to be present, renewing and recreating collective subjectivities.

The knowledge worked/constructed in school needs to be impregnated with the individuals' personal marks. For this, the pedagogical practices need to be transmuted into processes of awareness/problematization and intellectual autonomy. It is necessary that Freire's pedagogical principles enter the school praxis.

One more principle: pedagogy and didactics cannot be at the service of exclusion, but of sustainable, solidary, emancipatory projects and practices, which develop awareness of the rights and duties, of the social place of each one, of the necessary urgency of collective life.

In this sense, I propose a pedagogical struggle of resistance through critical pedagogy, insisting on spaces for the emergence of each individual in pedagogical practices, avoiding their subjugation in the torrent of homogenization and standardization of models and ways of teaching and thinking; the search for pedagogical practices that work in favor of clarification, creativity and coexistence among individuals; problematizing practices that lead to research and investigation of daily life, encouraging thought processes, intellectual autonomy and collective reflection.

Compatible with this pedagogical proposal, didactics will need to unveil its domesticating, technicist heritage and seek decolonial elements and practices.

I reaffirm the urgency for a decolonial perspective that produces the other's knowledge in education, the epistemic self of the student and the articulation of this self with the empirical self.

Thus, I reiterate the principle that didactics has a massive presence in the training of future teachers. A presence that produces a renewed immersion in meanings.

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