

**TEACHING WORK CONDITIONS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: A
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PANDEMIC TIMES IN THE CITY OF LONDRINA/PR**

***CONDIÇÕES DO TRABALHO DOCENTE NA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL: UMA
ANÁLISE CRÍTICA EM TEMPOS PANDEMICOS NA CIDADE DE LONDRINA/PR***

***CONDICIONES DE TRABAJO DOCENTE EN EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL: UN
ANÁLISIS CRÍTICO EN TIEMPOS DE PANDEMIA EN LA CIUDAD DE
LONDRINA/PR***

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ABSTRACT: This article intends, from a historical perspective, to explore the changes that have taken place in society since the 1990s, analyzing, in particular, the effects on education, and, consequently, on the teacher's work in pandemic times. In this perspective, this study aims to understand what are the elements that characterize the working conditions of early childhood education teachers in contemporary society, especially in the pandemic. As an investigative process, the study will be based on a qualitative, bibliographical research, based on the qualitative, bibliographical research, based on the dialectical method. Discussions will be based on research by Antunes and Alves (2004), Saviani (1984), Marx (2008), among others. At the end of the study, we found that it is necessary to invest in the improvement of working conditions in Early Childhood Education, through infrastructure and continuing education actions so that the teacher can carry out his role in a dignified manner and with the knowledge of practices needed.

KEYWORDS: Child education. Teaching work. Productive restructuring. Pandemic.

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RESUMO: Este artigo pretende, a partir de uma perspectiva histórica, explorar as mudanças ocorridas na sociedade a partir da década de 90, analisando, em específico, os reflexos sobre a educação e, conseqüentemente, sobre o trabalho do professor em tempos pandêmicos. Nesta perspectiva, este estudo tem como objetivo compreender quais são os elementos que caracterizam as condições de trabalho docente da Educação Infantil na sociedade contemporânea, em especial, na pandemia. Como processo investigativo, o estudo será pautado em uma pesquisa de abordagem qualitativa, bibliográfica, fundamentando-se no método dialético. As discussões serão baseadas nas pesquisas de Antunes e Alves (2004), Saviani (1984), Marx (2008), entre outros. Ao término do estudo, constatamos que se faz necessário investir na melhoria das condições de trabalho na Educação Infantil, por meio de ações de infraestrutura e de formação continuada, para que o professor possa realizar sua função de forma digna e com o conhecimento das práticas necessárias.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Educação infantil. Trabalho docente. Reestruturação produtiva. Pandemia.

RESUMEN: Este artículo pretende, desde una perspectiva histórica, explorar los cambios que se han producido en la sociedad desde la década de los años 1990,, analizando, en particular, los efectos en la educación y, en consecuencia, en el trabajo del docente en tiempos de pandemia. En esta perspectiva, este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender cuáles son los elementos que caracterizan las condiciones laborales de los docentes de educación infantil en la sociedad contemporánea, especialmente en la pandemia. Como proceso investigativo, el estudio se basará en una investigación bibliográfica cualitativa, basada en el método dialéctico. Las discusiones se basarán en la investigación de Antunes y Alves (2004), Saviani (1984), Marx (2008), entre otros. Al finalizar el estudio, encontramos que es necesario invertir en el mejoramiento de las condiciones laborales en Educación Infantil, a través de acciones de infraestructura y educación continua para que el docente pueda desempeñar su rol de manera digna y con el conocimiento de prácticas necesarias.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Educación infantil. Trabajo docente. Reestructuración productiva. Pandemia.

Introduction

The present study is the result of discussions held in the course: Education, human formation and praxis: implications of Marxism, cultural-historical theory and critical historical pedagogy for school education, linked to the Stricto Sensu Graduate Program in Education of the University of Londrina (UEL), by the Research Line "Teaching: Knowledge and Practices" of Nucleus 1: "Teacher Training".

Early Childhood Education in Brazil has been gaining notoriety in the work field and in the significant job market, especially since the beginning of the 90's, with its institutionalization as the first stage of Basic Education and with the involvement of the municipalities in the public offer of day care centers and preschools.

Thus, the current context is marked by the productive restructuring of capital, which has been causing intense change in the political, economic, social and educational spheres, especially for the working class. According to Harvey (1989), the transformations affecting society today are the result of the implementation of the Taylorist and Fordist model, creating forms for flexible accumulation, which began in the 1970s through the rapid implementation of new organizational forms of work and production technologies, which meant the need for a new perspective on worker training.

Therefore, in the context of a society marked by major transformations in the world of work, a study that can contribute to a reflection about the working conditions of the Early Childhood Education teacher is essential, especially in times of pandemic, which leads us to a complex discussion that brings the teacher closer to the working class in general, in terms of working conditions.

Investigating this issue imposes some questions that help us systematize the research into one question, mainly: in what way do the working conditions of Kindergarten teachers reflect possibilities or precariousness in their profession in times of pandemic? From this perspective, this study aims to understand what are the elements that characterize the working conditions of Early Childhood Education teachers, especially in the pandemic.

Regarding the theoretical and methodological aspects, this study is a bibliographic research, qualitative in nature, based on the dialectical method, aiming to give special attention to the category of totality - thus, to the apprehension of the object in its multiple relationships, understanding that the object analyzed here is part of a unitary social complex. Paulo Netto (2011) approaches that for the Marxist conception it is necessary to study all the conditions of existence of the various social formations. Thus, research in the human sciences, in this perspective, starts from the whole to the object of research, understanding that the object to be analyzed is part of a unitary social complex.

Thus, the organization of this article is divided in two moments. The first discusses the world of work in capitalist society, and how the productive restructuring of capital has been provoking transformations in society, especially in the educational field. The second aims to discuss the working conditions of the Early Childhood Education teacher, especially in pandemic times. And finally, it aims to verify the implications of the conditions of the teaching work in Early Childhood Education from the investigative bibliographical survey, correlating it with the readings and discussions about the theme.

Restructuring capital: a historical and reflexive analysis of teachers' work

The current scenario is marked by the processes of decentralization, productive restructuring and the fragmentation of work "[...] added to the technological increment [...]" (ANTUNES, 2015, p. 39), in order to enable the capital changes in political, economic, social and educational aspects.

According to Antunes and Alves (2004), the productive restructuring was a process that began in the second half of the twentieth century and that corresponded to the process of flexibilization in production processes as a condition to overcome the crisis attributed to the Taylorist-Fordist system.

In summary, flexible accumulation was a new way found by capitalism to overcome its crises and its internal contradictions and, in this way, allow the reproduction of capital and its concentration among those who have historically accessed the production of wealth in humanity:

[...] the owners of capital buy the labor force they need for the elaboration of their products and of general wealth; the non-owners sell their labor force, receiving in exchange the wage with which they buy the means of subsistence they need to continue working (JUNIOR, 1990, p. 27).

In this perspective, the explanation for the exploitation of labor power is revealed by the existence of profits: in the logic of capital, the worker begins to work more intensely, seeking to capture the maximum productivity of labor within the prevailing technical conditions. This situation means more work, more energy expenditure by the worker, resulting in the intensification of the exploitation of labor power.

The Taylorist/Fordist pattern in the 20th century generated a strong disqualification of work, there were several separate tasks to be performed. By fragmenting production, the worker finds himself increasingly exploited. In light of this, Antunes and Alves (2004) state that, through this model, workers are precarious in the work environment and, in the more recent period of industry, outsourced, subcontracted, underpaid, among others.

With the productive restructuring of capital we observe that the human labor force has been replaced by machines, which "[...] it has been possible to observe a reduction of the stable proletariat, heir of the Taylorist/Fordist phase (ANTUNES; ALVES, 2004, p. 337).

Therefore, when we reflect on the teaching work in the context of our contemporary society, numerous concerns arise in the midst of social, political, economic, cultural, and pedagogical transformations in working conditions.

Historically, work in the capitalist mode of production modifies nature and man at the same time. This production of existence becomes guided by objectives that separate them from the products of this process, taking the labor force as an element of exploitation (SAVIANI, 1984).

It is worth pointing out that in the capitalist society the organization of work is done through the purchase and sale of labor power (ALVES, 2000). In this sense, it is possible to understand that labor is one more commodity appropriated by capital as a way to create values. The question is, therefore, if the teacher's work is a commodity, what is its value in this capitalist society?

Under this observation, we can infer that the precariousness of work has its beginning in the relationship that the capital created to submit the worker to the condition of being a stranger to himself and to the product of his work (MARX, 2008). The teacher, being a worker in this capitalist society, also becomes a stranger to his craft, because he does not recognize his relevance in transmitting content in class as a possibility to politically and ideologically influence a new generation. He becomes a stranger to the product of his work, by not identifying the possibilities that a student has through his new knowledge.

Concomitantly, as a way of valuing the work of the teacher, especially of Early Childhood Education, in the capitalist society, the strangeness of his work and the product of his work in this same society, it is considered fundamental to understand the working conditions of this professional. Oliveira and Vieira (2012, p. 156) consider that the notion of working conditions, in general, designates

[...] a set of resources that enable work to be performed, involving the physical facilities, the materials and inputs available, the equipment and means of relating the activities and other types of support required, depending on the nature of production. However, working conditions are not restricted to the workplace or the realization of the work process itself, i.e., the process that transforms inputs and raw materials into commodities, but also concern employment relations.

According to the quote, we can consider that working conditions are also interconnected to employment relations or forms of hiring, remuneration, career, financial stability, etc., in this sense, employment becomes an amount of time sold or exchanged for some form of payment. The authors explain that employment relations vary according to the historical-geographical context, "[...] may present greater or lesser stability depending on the correlation of forces within the broader social relations" (OLIVEIRA; VIEIRA, 2012, p. 156).

Teaching work conditions are linked to the work process in educational environments, such as schools, preschools, day care centers, and other spaces that develop the educational

process. According to Hypolito (2012), the precariousness in teaching work is related to the issues and general conditions of work, involving physical aspects, teaching and personnel aspects, preparation time for teaching activities, emotional pressure, professional valuation or prestige, exclusive dedication, study incentive, salary floor, readjustment guarantees, number of students per class, social monitoring of students, among other elements.

Often, working conditions are organized into

[...] division of tasks and responsibilities, the working day, the material resources available for the performance of activities, the times and spaces to perform the work, even the forms of performance evaluation, working hours, didactic-pedagogical procedures, admission and administration of teaching careers, remuneration conditions, among others (OLIVEIRA and VIEIRA, 2012, p. 157).

Due to the precariousness of the work, where performing the act of teaching loses its centrality in detriment of other needs, caused by poverty, the loss of the teaching identity becomes one of the characteristic elements of the precariousness of the work in the basic education network, especially in regions with low income populations.

Having said this, we can see that the socio-political, economic, and cultural scenario of contemporary society presents challenges and worries as far as the teaching professional is concerned. It is in this pandemic moment that we will pay attention to this exploitation of work that leads the teacher to exhaustion, causing suffering and sickness, especially in times of pandemic.

Conditions of the teaching work in Early Childhood Education in pandemic times

To deal with the teaching work in Early Childhood Education it is necessary to understand the concept of work; therefore, we start from the Marxist conception, which understands that work is an action of man in the transformation of nature for his survival and humanization. In the capitalist production mode, work is characterized by contradictions, since in this context it becomes an alienated action for the reproduction of capital interests (SAVIANI, 2007).

When we understand work as an educational process, we observe its positive character, because through it, man acts over nature, transforming it and producing his existence, raised to the condition of generic being. This work becomes, therefore, "[...] the objectification of the generic life of man: when he duplicates himself not only in consciousness, intellectual[mind],

but operative, effective[mind], contemplating himself, therefore, in a world created by him" (MARX, 2008, p. 85).

In this regard, man becomes free, conscious and rational, seeking his emancipation. We would say, then, that the act of producing and transforming nature to satisfy human needs is what we know as labor. In this way, the human essence is not something natural, but historically produced by men through work (SAVIANI, 2007).

However, work is the defining act of man that seeks to ensure his survival in the capitalist world, producing his existence, regardless of any given social form. From this perspective, it is understood that work is the essential characteristic that defines man in his totality (SAVIANI, 2007).

The worker, in contemporary society, stops producing to meet his vital needs and starts selling his labor force as merchandise to ensure his subsistence. The work then becomes alienated, because it takes away the satisfaction in performing it and the pleasure for the function, offering him exploitation and devaluation, becoming, therefore, an external work, of self-sacrifice and mortification (MARX, 2008). In this way, Antunes and Alves (2004) point out that "Understanding [...] the working class today, in a broad way, implies understanding this set of social beings who live from the sale of their labor power, who are wage earners and devoid of the means of production [...]" (p. 343).

After discussing, although briefly, about the work in the view of Marx (2008) and Saviani (2007), think about the issue of the Early Childhood Education teacher and his action as an educator, a subject that seeks knowledge and takes knowledge to those who need it, forming critical citizens who can free themselves from the exploitation of labor, the teacher fights against the oppressive system, but is defeated due to

[...] an admirable technical paraphernalia for understanding and facing challenges about work. Yet none of this is taken into account when thinking about education. Commitment at work, worker satisfaction, relationships with the hierarchy, attitudes towards work, mental load at work, issues that are trivial in any work organization are not even brought up when discussing the crisis in Brazilian education (CODO, 1999, p. 93).

The exploitation of the teaching work, previously seen by many as exclusive to the private teaching system, starts to gain more space in the public system in the tragic reality of the Coronavirus pandemic. With the virus came quarantine, fear, anxiety, remote teaching, excessive work, exhaustion, and indignation. Amidst the chaos, society started clamoring for the return of classes, even in the condition of 500,000 dead by Covid-19, blaming the teachers for not returning to class, justifying that they didn't want to work. So we raise the question:

when did teachers stop working in this pandemic? They worked and continue to work, remotely, much more than they did face-to-face in the institutions.

The Early Childhood Education teacher faces several difficulties in his or her teaching work, especially when it comes to the public education network. In their school routine, teachers attend to up to twenty children in person, carry out research, planning, evaluations, cuttings, portfolios, and pedagogical support materials, with the objective of making their classes more attractive and productive for the children. Many times, the support materials are paid for by the teachers themselves, since the institution does not have them.

The hours worked at the institution are not enough to perform all the tasks that are the teacher's responsibility, so the teacher is forced to take work to be done at home.

From the beginning, it was clear that teachers' work was much more than teaching classes (because they had to plan and prepare them) and ended much later (because they had to do evaluations and account for what they had done, to the schools or to the students' parents/guardians, on how to fill out records, forms, report cards, and because they had to participate in meetings and other programming, often outside working hours). These activities took up time, forcing teachers to do their work at home. It was work without limits: it did not end at the end of the day, but invaded their entire lives (FERREIRA, 2019, p. 4).

If in "normal" times the teacher's work was hard, now in the pandemic context the situation has worsened. Teachers had to open the doors of their homes for children and their families to enter, even virtually. The private environment, which used to be considered a place of rest and refuge, is now called a "home-office". But not only that, the teacher made available technological tools for personal use such as: computer, camera, microphone, printer, internet, electricity, furniture, among others, so that the remote classes could take place.

The routine situations in a home when they become public, such as childcare or the circulation of other family members, generates a situation of embarrassment. In addition, remote teaching involved adaptations in spaces and furniture, not to mention that the expense necessary for the work falls on the workers' backs, such as energy, internet, chair, etc. (MELITO, 2020)

The remote teaching brought the need to use digital resources, overnight the teachers had to reinvent themselves, they started to record and edit videos, download photos and videos, fill out reports, call and send messages to their families, among many other tasks. The hours worked, which were not enough inside the institutions, went beyond, intensifying the precariousness of the teachers' working conditions.

To cope with all the tasks, it is necessary to perform activities outside the formal working day, such as recording lessons, making them available on digital platforms and answering students through applications like WhatsApp, often in groups created by the school coordination itself (SOUZA, 2021, p. 6).

According to Esteve (1999), the teacher is overloaded with work, lacking time to meet the numerous responsibilities that have been accumulating on him, forcing him to perform a fragmentary activity, in which he must fight simultaneously, and on different fronts, performing a list of demands that seems endless.

Saviani and Galvão (2021, p. 39) warn us about the submission of unlimited labor power:

Now, what prevents the generalization of this stage of increased free time for the enjoyment of leisure and the cultivation of the spirit is the private appropriation of the means of production and the products of labor, so that from being a means of freeing human individuals from hard labor and a means of reducing the time of socially necessary work, technology becomes an instrument of submission of the labor force to an unlimited time, leading the human being to exhaustion.

The teacher, who already felt the disrespect of society in general, began to feel the disrespect within the institution itself. With the pandemic, the disrespect became even more explicit in the school environment, the non-recognition of the teachers' work became the managers' own and, with this, the demands for proving that they were really working at home increased.

It is also important to highlight that this hasty process of implementing remote teaching contributes to the intensification of teachers' illness. In addition to the pressure and surveillance imposed on teachers, which can be characterized as harassment, the constant use of technologies, with which not everyone is familiar, increases the possibilities of physical and mental illness. The increased workload also occurs under unfavorable subjective conditions, since many teachers have to deal with telecommuting amid domestic chores and family demands (INFORMANDES, 2020, p. 12).

Amidst attacks, mistrust and injustice, teachers face impacts on their mental and physical health. Distress, fear, anxiety, nervousness, mental exhaustion, stress, irritability, depression, fatigue, insomnia are part of this new teacher's routine. Feelings that were developed due to the pandemic have been aggravated by the conditions of the teaching work.

Workplaces that demand high levels of performance and productivity, structured on the basis of demands that increasingly exceed human physical and mental capacities, can only be maintained through different and sophisticated mechanisms of control and coercion. Moral harassment is part of the machinery. [...] Practices of this nature are management tools designed to guarantee, by means of institutionalized pressure, both a constant increase

in productivity and the isolation and exclusion of those who constitute "barriers" to its full realization (ANTUNES, 2020, p. 153).

The abuse of management power in the institutions, imposing and subjecting the teacher class to their wills, demanding beyond what teachers could accomplish within their working day, took away their voice with a discourse of losing their jobs or their salaries if they did not accomplish it. "The ideas of the ruling class are, in every epoch, the ruling ideas" (MARX; ENGELS, 2007, p. 47)

In this context in which lives are treated as numbers, psychic suffering, work overload, harassment suffered at work, among other issues, continue to be disregarded. It is not the quality of teaching or the safety of the school actors that are put on the agenda, but the idea that teachers need to return to their work to justify their salary (NETO; PIRES, 2020, p. 52).

As all the demands on the teacher in relation to the remote classes were not enough, besides working in a home office system, they were summoned to go in person to the institutions in Londrina/PR at least twice a week, to give continuity to the care of the children, even if remotely, in the institution.

Remote teaching is teaching for control. The control of the companies that took advantage of the moment to spread their privatizing elements. The control of teachers, who have their classes recorded and suffer harassment from conservative managers and parents. The control of the contents that become easier to monitor and, at the same time, are emptied of meaning. The control of the working class that becomes more excluded and is even more denied the right to appropriate the historical legacy accumulated by humanity in a critical way that questions the established reality (NETO; PIRES, 2020, p. 59).

The teacher's autonomy was taken away, the teacher who planned their classes and their actions began to obey and follow what his superiors ordered. The teacher tried to exercise their right as a democratic citizen; after all, the management in which he is inserted claims to be democratic, but the one who seeks a voice, questions or resists impositions is considered an obstacle in the capitalist society, where power rules. In the face of any resistance from the teacher, retaliations are brought in order to silence him/her and, thus, they don't just take away his/her voice, but attitudes, transforming the teacher's work into a productive force only in exchange for a salary.

I believe that facing the teachers' suffering demands a strong investment in the formation for resistance: resistance against the "meaninglessness" of the teaching work, resistance against mass certification; resistance against the breaking of democratic rights and, above all, resistance against the conversion of school institutions into institutions destined to the uncritical execution of

policies limited to the interests of the bourgeois State. If such challenges can only be faced collectively, there is another challenge, and this one, yes, under responsibility - Teaching (for control) remote: almost an episode of Black Mirror of each teacher in particular: resist the destruction of the collective mechanisms of struggle! (MARTINS, 2018, p. 141).

Unfortunately, in the face of so many struggles, teachers' resistance is losing strength. Several surveys show the innumerable cases of teachers who are on sick leave, unmotivated, frustrated with their profession. Thus, the best that a teacher has, the enchantment in teaching, the pleasure in relating to his students and the love for teaching, end up being suffocated by the lack of appreciation and recognition that he is entitled to, being exploited and massacred by the educational society as well. It's hard to believe that you can overcome the power of the ruling class and be free to really play your role as an educator.

Final considerations

The working conditions for teachers, whether in the private or public schools, continue to be managed by the capitalist system. The teacher's role, as the one who forms critical citizens within the institutions, becomes that of a mere transmitter of content. This exploitation of the teacher's work leads the teacher to exhaustion, causing suffering and illness.

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers have, as always, gone beyond what is due to them. They turned their homes into classrooms, they used their own resources so that classes could continue. At no time were these teachers asked if they needed support in their homes, either with technological tools or even help with the cost of internet, electricity, etc. Even with all the demands, overwork, lack of knowledge in dealing with technologies, a mixture of feelings regarding the pandemic and the institutions' abuse of power, the teacher spared no efforts to do his job with excellence. However, we need to pay attention to this condition of the teacher's work, because despite everything the teacher does, it is not enough, leading the teacher to question whether it is really worth it to exercise his or her office.

We can conclude that capitalism, and consequently the economic power, has no interest in forming critical, thinking, and questioning citizens, because they are considered inconvenient for the ruling class. The teacher who presents these characteristics, when he confronts those who impose an excessive workload on the working class, ends up suffering retaliations that end up shutting him up, because he depends on work for his own survival.

This is a sad reality that insists on remaining with the class struggle, dominant and dominating, and that leads the one who seeks his freedom through work to live as a hostage of a capitalist society that does not value the essence of the subjects.

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