

## 2020 AND THE REMOTE TEACHING PANDEMIC

### 2020 E A PANDEMIA DO ENSINO REMOTO

### 2020 Y LA PANDEMIA DE LA ENSEÑANZA A DISTANCIA

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**ABSTRACT:** This text is a reflection on the context of remote emergency education experienced in the year 2020, due to the social isolation caused by the pandemic of covid-19. This is an essay on the educational context caused by the pandemic that unfolds in two parts: (a.) The identification of false premises about education evidenced by the emergency situation and (b.) a mix of bitterness and nostalgia provoked by the circumstances. In the end, there is hope of a renewed world, of healthy agglomerations and face-to-face education with the end of this terrible pandemic.

**KEYWORDS:** Pandemic. Remote teaching. Education.

**RESUMO:** Este texto é uma reflexão sobre o contexto de ensino emergencial remoto vivido no ano de 2020, por conta do isolamento social provocado pela pandemia da covid-19. Trata-se de um ensaio sobre o contexto da educação ocasionado pela pandemia que se desdobra em duas partes: (a.) a identificação de falsas premissas sobre educação evidenciadas pela situação emergencial e (b.) um misto de amargor e nostalgia provocado pelas circunstâncias. Ao final, fica a esperança de um mundo renovado, de aglomerações saudáveis e ensino presencial com o final dessa terrível pandemia.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Pandemia. Ensino remoto. Educação.

**RESUMEN:** Este texto es una reflexión sobre el contexto de educación de emergencia remota vivido en el año 2020, debido al aislamiento social provocado por la pandemia del covid-19. Se trata de un ensayo sobre el contexto de la educación provocado por la pandemia que se desarrolla en dos partes: (a.) La identificación de premisas falsas sobre la educación evidenciadas por la situación de emergencia y (b.) Una mezcla de amargura y nostalgia provocada por las circunstancias. Al final, existe la esperanza de un mundo renovado, de aglomeraciones saludables y educación presencial con el fin de esta terrible pandemia.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Pandemia. Enseñanza a distancia. Educación.

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## Introduction

*Essa noite / This night  
Eu tive um sonho de sonhador / I had a dreamer's dream  
Maluco que sou, acordei / Crazy as I am, I woke  
No dia em que a Terra parou. / In the day that the Earth Stopped  
(Raul Seixas, O dia em que a Terra parou, 1977)*

This text is an essay on the context of remote emergency education experienced in 2020 [which extends into 2021], due to the social isolation caused by the covid-19 pandemic. It was in mid-March of that year that we received the news, the decrees, the resolutions etc. that it was necessary, in the name of public health, to isolate oneself. A lethal virus, easily spread through the air, had taken over several places on the planet and therefore, being together became dangerous.

After accepting this sanitary idea of forced collective quarantine, the first institutional measure taken was to ask teachers how it would be possible, for two weeks, to remotely conduct the ongoing pedagogical course (as if nothing strange was happening). For two weeks, that seemed to be quite doable.

But here we are, 60 weeks later, in May 2021, April of this year having been the month with the highest number of contagious deaths recorded in Brazil, since the beginning of the pandemic. These data make it clear that the pandemic was not a dream dreamed of by *Maluco Beleza*, because the Earth stopped not because there was no more war or disease and that all isolation was not something combined but caused by a virus capable of putting an end to human life.

However, despite the unfavorable situation, the Earth cannot afford to stop to avoid contagion and death, as our model of complex society is also very fragile. Built under industrial capitalism, a structure as solid as a house of cards was created, always on the verge of collapse. No wonder that the same Raul Seixas, in 1974, in the song about his adventures in the city of Thor, had already noted that “Civilization has become complicated, that it has become as fragile as a computer; that if a child discovers the Achilles' heel, with a single toothpick he stops the engine”. The pandemic is laying bare this fragility as it reveals that the Earth cannot stop, because if it does, its effects will be as destructive, if not more destructive, than a pandemic that wipes out hundreds of thousands of lives. So, nothing can stop. It is necessary to “reinvent oneself”, as they say. Education too, whose reinvention is not a new education formula aimed at humanization, but at the transmission of content. And that can be done over the internet, they say.

All of this motivated the record of the academic journey in the year 2020, specifically, regarding the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on education. It is not about thinking about its negative impacts around the globe, nor about weaving an analysis of the widening distance between social classes. The main objective of this paper is to promote reflections on the context, by recovering the experience lived as a teacher educator, professor of various pedagogical disciplines in three degrees, at the Federal Institute, in Itapetininga, in the southwest of São Paulo. In this sense, there are two basic things to register: (i.) the mistaken assumptions about education and the use of digital technologies; (ii;) nostalgia for the live world in the face of the bitterness of teaching in an emergency, distant and, worse, gadget-mediated format.

Let's go by parts, hoping that the writing of this essay sheds some light to understand the lived moment.

### **From the assumptions emerging in the pandemic**

*A pandemic of this size is justifiably causing worldwide commotion. Although dramatization is justified, it is good to always bear in mind the shadows that visibility creates. (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, A Cruel Pedagogia do Vírus, 2020, our translation).*

There are many news<sup>2</sup> portraying social isolation and the consequent migration from school education to teaching that was “saved” due to the internet. The news took over websites, continued to spread through social networks and (re)formulating public opinion. Things like “teachers have not been working since the beginning of the pandemic” or “the pandemic accelerated what was about to happen in terms of internet use in schools” quickly took over the social agenda and started to become true. Amid all this, several false allegations came to be taken as legitimate, causing a setback to the development of education. Here, then, is a short list of fallacious assumptions:

- Teachers are not working for months;
- It is necessary to plan creative, dynamic and fun classes to hold the student's attention;
- The pandemic only brought forward the inevitable remote learning, as this is

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<sup>2</sup> Just as an example, these two texts bring important elements to think about education mediated by digital media:

[https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/educacao/2020/07/12/internas\\_educacao,1166060/entre-solucao-e-pesadelo-na-pandemia-ensino-remoto-ainda-e-desafio.shtml](https://www.em.com.br/app/noticia/educacao/2020/07/12/internas_educacao,1166060/entre-solucao-e-pesadelo-na-pandemia-ensino-remoto-ainda-e-desafio.shtml) and <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/educacao/noticia/2020-10/pandemia-de-covid-19-fez-ensino-e-papel-do-professor-mudarem>. Access: 20 Dec. 2020.

the future of education.

It is quite complicated to argue against all these certainties, as they represent a huge delay in the search for an effectively transforming quality education. Search based on extensive work carried out by educators on the ground of schools, on theoretical formulations of universities and on ideological clashes in the political field. I have written about this at other times (FORTUNATO, 2016; 2018a; 2018b; 2019; 2020), so it becomes exhausting needing to explain again that education makes sense - and works - when you do not follow an externally imposed curriculum, when the teacher does not give lectures, but learns together with his students, especially when digital, analog, mechanical etc. technologies are available to collaborate with teaching in the way it was idealized, among others, by the patron of our education, Paulo Freire (2009, p. 23, our translation): “Whoever teaches learns by teaching and whoever learns teaches by learning”.

Even so, despite being tiring and redundant, the moment requires returning to some of the predicates already exposed, which are contrary to the previous listing. First, the issue of teaching work to be carried out only within the classroom, in a discourse. Well, this is a typical mistake made with several other occupations... like the iceberg metaphor, in which only a small portion is visible, as most of it is submerged in water, therefore hidden. It is like saying, for example, that an athlete only works on competition day, ignoring all physical, mental, nutritional, strategic etc. work developed to have full conditions to compete in sports. Thus, revolving around what has already been drafted previously (FORTUNATO, 2018c), being a teacher goes beyond classes and its residual burden of preparing material and correcting activities - probably what one imagines out there when expressing that the teaching work is not just the one in the classroom. This submerged part involves research and guidance, and it is a mistake to believe that this is reserved for graduate school only.

After all, it is enough to consider as valid, for example, the references to Education made in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Federal Constitution to understand that the work of teachers is intended for “full development”. This means, therefore, that the essence of the profession only guides the curricular contents from which the lecture and the consequent activities that require correction are prepared. But the axis of the work is the preparation for life, indicating paths, presenting challenges, learning and teaching, at the same time, knowledge and skills, affections and emotions, transforming the student into someone who wants to become. None of this should be new, as it has been written in

abundance around there, in the works of Rubem Alves (1994), Paulo Freire (2009), Célestin Freinet (1985) etc., and even by Comênio (1985).

In this way, despite the clarity with which the most basic objectives of education are expressed, the role and responsibility of teachers in the development of each student remains confused with the task of teaching something ready and finished, preferentially equipping students. Therefore, among so many ironies that surround the teaching profession, the temporary closing of schools due to the covid-19 pandemic brings up the following question: “Teacher, do you work or do you only teach?”. Using this ironic question as the title of his thesis, Oliveira (2016) does well to point out that this issue goes far beyond the sarcasm and stereotype of teaching, as it bears, in a very blatant way, the devaluation, marginalization and precariousness of the teaching. Hence the splinter surrounding in times of social quarantine that teachers and female teachers would not be working or teaching.

It is not about denying the fact that the teaching profession still has room to develop; on the contrary, it is necessary to investigate, increasingly, what the idea of “preparing for life” means, going far beyond qualifying for a job. But, in this sense, the development of teaching requires the concomitant development of formal education itself, under penalty of postulating, *ad aeternum*, the tablets of the salvation of education through the renewal of classroom practices. This has been done at least since the 17th century, as we can see in the treatise on the universal art of teaching everything to everyone, through which Comênio (1985, p. 44, our translation) sought a “[...] method according to which teachers teach less and students learn more; in schools, there is less noise, less boredom, less useless work, and, on the contrary, there is more recollection, more attractive and more solid progress”. As this search has more than three centenarians, it is evident that, no matter how much one speaks, writes and projects a renewal of education, everything always comes back to the classroom, in which a teacher speaks about some curriculum content to a student collective, which must grasp what is being discussed because it is important. Or at least someone said it was important.

Thus, the closing of schools did not make teachers not work. In some cases, there was an almost instantaneous migration from the concrete classroom, live, to work carried out remotely by internet mediation and its digital access devices. In others, such as the case of our Federal Institute, there was a longer stop, involving analysis of the situation and debates on issues ranging from the conditions of access of each teacher and student, through physical and mental health issues, until we fell back on the remote model – at least on an emergency basis, during the permanence of isolation. Thus, "continuing", by digital remote medium, brought to

the surface the other two statements listed above as fallacies: that it is necessary to plan classes to catch the attention of students, and that isolation only advanced the inevitable, that is, classes over the internet.

Well, about classes, I always agreed with Célestin Freinet, although I did not know, until a few years ago, as a teacher educator, that there was an almost centenary slogan capable of translating what I always thought: “down to classes” (FREINET, 1979, p. 100). I found this slogan in the book written by his wife Elise, in which he recorded that, for Célestin Freinet, a student should only turn to the teacher if he does not find his own solutions to more complex and/or difficult situations. Explanations, speeches, chatter... all this would be useless for a fully developed education. “Classes are the quintessential formula of traditional teaching between four walls”, stated Elise Freinet (1979, p. 100, our translation). “The big mistake of traditional teaching was, in my opinion, the class and the duties that follow from it”, stated Célestin Freinet (*apud* FREINET, 1979, p. 101, our translation).

Well, the equation, then, becomes very simple: if the idea of traditional education has been fought for a long time and what supports traditional education is the class, it is enough, therefore, to end this idea of class – *down to classes*, such what is the flag raised by Freinet. However, this movement does not exist. Paradoxically, it is preferable to maintain a discourse against traditionalism in schools **and** a discourse in favor of classes to captivate and maintain the interest of the students regarding what is chattering. Worse, it creates an idea that if classes become dynamic and fun, all students will magically become interested in the curricular contents named as fundamental for the future of each one.

Well, first, this thing is not possible, as there is no universal proposal for what is dynamic, fun and interesting. It is enough to take any element of culture to understand that this universality is impossible; the top-grossing movies, the hottest music shows, the most award-winning cuisine, and so on. If none of this is dynamic, fun and interesting for all people, what about a time destined to force a learning curve? If there is no way to promote universal entertainment, there is no way to promote a class that is dynamic and interesting to everyone. Except, of course, if the class is another one, in which there are no lectures, the contents are not the same for everyone and only the teacher is used to resolve dilemmas, impasses and really complicated situations.

In this way, if the class does not cease to be a class, it will hardly be interesting, being necessary the imposition of control mechanisms or attractiveness artifices. But if the class turns into a meeting point for discoveries and doubts, then no covert technique of fascination

will be needed. Many decades ago, Célestin Freinet (apud FREINET, 1979) recorded the following statement:

Distrust the traditional school, the classes, the exercises. They are apparently comfortable processes, enshrined by custom and whose methodical results can be carefully noted in notebooks that are, in effect, models, or in tables that are very well done and refined to move us. It is needed to deeply interest children in life, in their own life and in the life that surrounds them. (FREINET *apud* FREINET, 1979, p. 103, our translation).

If there was already something quite problematic in face-to-face, live classes, permeated not only by listening, speaking and performing exercises (for grades and/or to reinforce something to be charged in the local or external test), what about remote classes, without the affection of the senses, mediated by a screen?

Thus, we arrive at the last of the false premises promoted by the relationship between the covid-19 pandemic and education: social isolation would only have advanced the inevitable use of machines. The internet only reached our homes in the 1990s, intensifying its presence in everyday life at the beginning of the century and becoming an intrinsic element of life in this decade, with the popularization of smartphones and social networks. However, thinking about machines in education is not anticipating the future, but going back, at least to the 1950s.

After all, it was in this decade that Skinner (1972) revealed how his teaching machines could very well replace teachers in traditional content transmission school education. Instead of having a teacher lecture a collective of students capable of absorbing such content in irregular ways, each would work alone in a machine, advancing at their own pace. It is curious to note that Skinner's (1972) proposal was not to replace teachers, but rather to reveal how traditional education was outdated, being easily carried out mechanically. As previously stated, fighting the premises highlighted by the pandemic is exhausting and repetitive, as I have already recorded for some years that the much-desired pedagogical renewal does not depend on this digital internet technology (HERRÁN; FORTUNATO, 2017).

But, just as the Freinetian slogan of “down to classes” was ignored by the school tradition, the tacit criticism of Skinnerian teaching machines remained far from disturbing the daily practices of educational institutions. Instead of promoting a transformation of classes based on the understanding that all of this was just repetition, it started to insist on treating teaching as the forged inclusion of traditional teaching techniques under other labels, such as

active methodologies<sup>3</sup>, or the imposition of the use of digital technologies through something called hybrid education<sup>4</sup>, in the name of the inevitable virtual future to come.

Thus, it was argued here that teachers work not only in the classroom and for the classroom (preparing their speech and correcting the activities), but in orientation and joint learning. It was also argued how inappropriate it is to think about classes to “grab the students' attention”, since the problem is the class itself as a central element of a traditional education understood as outdated. Still, it was revealed that technology in education is not innovation, as well as its hybridity is not something new and will not be your slate of salvation.

With this, the three main premises as aspects of the covid-19 pandemic, drawn from the experience, were refuted. Such scars, in turn, bring to light the nostalgia of a time when there was an education of guidance and learning, of challenges and experiences. This time is not from the old days when things were supposed to be better. That time is literally one day before the quarantine decree.

### **Of nostalgia for Education in the concrete world**

*Oh! que saudades que tenho / OH! How I miss  
Da aurora da minha vida, / The dawn of my life  
Da minha infância querida / My dear childhood  
Que os anos não trazem mais! / That the years will not bring back  
anymore  
Que amor, que sonhos, que flores, / Such love, such dreams, such  
flowers  
Naquelas tardes fagueiras / In those fawn afternoons  
À sombra das bananeiras, / In the shadow of banana trees  
Debaixo dos laranjais! / Under orange orchards  
(Casemiro de Abreu, *Meus Oito Anos*, 1857).*

Just as the poet lists everything he misses and that he feels he can no longer experience, I will also make a short list of what he has missed the most in this year of

<sup>3</sup> This is not to deny the importance of this method of teaching, on the contrary, it is extremely valuable to go against traditional education. The problem is to consider it as innovative and unprecedented, instead of realizing that it is the same thing that, since João Amos Comênio and probably even before, educators have been insisting. For example, how José Manuel Moran (2012, p. 19, our translation) states about active methodologies: “learning takes place from real problems and situations; the same ones that students will experience later in their professional life, in advance, during the course”. That is, nothing new.

<sup>4</sup> Hybrid teaching is also in active methodologies texts, being defined, for example, by Christensen, Horn and Staker (2013, p. 7, our translation) as follows: “Hybrid teaching is a formal education program in which a student learns, at least in part through online teaching, with some element of student control over the time, place, mode and/or pace of study, and at least in part in a supervised physical location outside their home”. Well, about 100 years ago, Freinet (2018a) was already promoting this hybridity without digital technology, much less without any element of control.



pandemic. In these long months of isolation, I can say: Oh! that I miss being in the classroom, interacting, provoking and being provoked to learn about different aspects of life; missing the conversation circles on the living room floor, in the Institute's corridors or even in the open air; what is needed is to think, plan and create challenging and exciting activities that make us learn to manage problems and at the same time entertain! I miss the so-called "educational missions" (FORTUNATO, 2018d), through which there was interaction and intervention in the most varied places of education, from basic and technical education schools, through non-governmental organizations and places of social reclusion, such as Fundação Casa and the prisons, and even the city itself as history and culture.

It is almost certain that there is something romantic in this list, as it is imbued with very subjective ideals and feelings, gathered from an educational daily life that was emergently remote from the pandemic, lived with discontent. Weaving such a list is escapism, the definition of which, borrowed from the Cambridge Dictionary<sup>5</sup>, refers to "a way of avoiding unpleasant or tedious things". It is, therefore, about finding an escape route through thinking, imagination, reading and/or writing activities that are more exciting, interesting, fruitful, etc., but impossible. It is also worth considering this escapism exactly as outlined by Jones, Cronin and Piacentini (2018, p. 498): "the self-selected separation of oneself from one's immediate reality", or, still, in the understanding of Stenseng, Rise and Kraft (2012, p. 19), as "reliefs from the routines and obligations of everyday life [...] a survival mechanism typical of humans".

In fact, the studies by Stenseng, Rise and Kraft (2012) reveal that exercising escapism – popularly known as an escape valve or overflowing activity – operates in two ways. One of them, called self-expansion, promotes focus, increases motivation and engagement. The second, named self-suppression, takes the focus off and becomes a preventive exercise, because, although it does not increase the effort and desire to develop a certain activity, it does divert attention from what is boring, tiring, stressful, etc.

In this way, the list of type Oh! I miss the time when educational processes were developed in person at the Institute, it becomes an evident form of escapism of the self-suppression type. Well, if naming the thing helps you to perceive it better, broadening your perception helps your understanding and decision making – choosing between keeping the current flow or directing the energy to other activities. As shown in another study, this is a possible key to self-resilience, in which one seeks to face the obstacles to a full life

<sup>5</sup> Available: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/escapism>. Access: 20 Dec. 2020.

(FORTUNATO; SCHWARTZ, 2019). In this time of isolation, pandemic and the emergence of a remote model to give some continuity to regular education, nostalgia becomes the escape, as being anchored in the possibilities of what has already been helps to keep the current moment in perspective.

So, I start with what becomes more evident by teaching mediated by the internet and its gadgets: people are not there, because, even if we are all connected at the same time, each one is in its own context. This has nothing to do with some personal frustration regarding the possible distractions caused by disinterest, as this was something frequent in classes in a concrete world. But, in the concrete world, it was possible to organize different activities for different groups or conduct individual orientations, all at the same time, in the same room or occupying different places. This leads to another bitterness of remote learning: we are stuck with the device of choice, making it very difficult to streamline; in a concrete world, it is possible to get up and walk, join a group developing a prototype on a bench and then migrate to another group holding a discussion wheel on the grass and, between them, individually assist a student that presents an idea of a scientific initiation or postgraduate or extension project or about something not related to the class, but to life. Important and fundamental conversations in university education, as well stated, for example, by Peter Singer (2016) when explaining how much this personal contact with students is necessary, but that it is increasingly lost.

In addition to the potential dispersion and imprisonment of the machine, another very distressing element of remote learning is the issue that the classroom is highlighted in this model. The traditionalism class, the slogan “down to classes”, the curricular content as the only element of pedagogical mediation. By leaving it expressed in the title of their work, Harper *et al.* (1980) stated that it is necessary to take “Careful, school”, after all:

The school treats everyone in the same way, everyone must work at the same pace, with the same book, the same material, everyone must learn the same phrases, know the same words. Everyone must acquire the same knowledge, must take the same exams, at the same time (HARPER *et al.*, 1980, p. 54, our translation).

The indignations contained in this work, published 40 years ago, in the early 1980s, about an archaic, outdated education that does not fit into the daily lives of students are very similar to those of Célestin Freinet in the 1920s and even those of João Coménios, back in the 17th century. Thus, we return to one of the mistaken premises discussed in the previous section, revealing, therefore, that the intense bitterness of teaching in the emergency remote

model is that of living in the contradiction of battling traditionalism while the media limit the pedagogical action to the traditional.

These criticisms also find echo in the ideas of Alexander Sutherland Neill, schoolmaster from the beginning of the last century who, tired, indignant, dismayed, furious, etc., with the school way of treating all students in the same way, demanding the same tasks from everyone at the same time and moment, he abandoned everything to create the Summerhill Free School. In telling his story of failure as a teacher in a regular school before he took the courage to embark on his enterprise on freedom in education, Neill (1978) explains his underlying assumptions.

First, he believed that a curriculum imposed by school authorities and reproduced in classrooms by teachers was not education, as it implied forcefully introducing its contents. By force, at that time, there was a literal sense of physical punishment for students who did not know the tables of tables or the capitals of the countries. Therefore, Neill (1978, p. 83, our translation) would have registered the following: “If I forced all these young people to sit and pay attention to what I say, I would not be training them to face difficulties. I would simply be oppressing them, making them a dependent race.”

This first assumption is something widely seen and experienced in formal education. It is true that some years ago the idea that the student needs to develop their own autonomy was included and, with this, sometimes questioning with doubts the statements given in the lectures of their teachers and recorded in their textbook, handout or support material. Nevertheless, these doubts and even criticisms always surround the curriculum, as if demonstrating interest in a subject that is outside the teacher's or teacher's speech was synonymous with affronting authority. This has been a major obstacle to the slogan “down to classes”, as students often ask things like “what do you [the teacher] expect from this work to be delivered?” or “what exactly do you want us to learn?” and so on.

The second assumption follows this same line of thought, as it is directly related to the way in which teachers present (or pass on) the contents to their students. In this regard, Neill (1978, p. 34) was categorical: “We must not say: *This is right*, because we do not know what is right; we must not say: *This is wrong*, because we do not know what is wrong”. Even though we can sometimes be sure they are right, most fall into a category qualified by the author as “meaningless”. And that's almost always the case.

For example, when working with a certain learning theory with a graduation class, this theory may have been included in the syllabus by myself or by another professor, that is, by the person responsible for producing the document. Well then, to present and treat such a

theory as certain is to present and treat my (or another's) experience as certain; or worse, this theory may not even have been experienced, but is now taken for granted. And since I encountered these writings by Neill (1978) I have questioned what it means to teach, after all, I agree in genre, number and degree with the idea that everything I teach is something important to me. That's why it's more interesting and educational to learn together than to teach what you know.

In this way, Neill (1978) would have proposed the end of the curriculum. This would lead to two fundamental elements for education: without curriculum imposition, students would be free to learn what interests them most; moreover, without the existence of a pre-defined curriculum, there would be no mass teaching, as it would not be possible to classify education. In case there was no curriculum, students would learn quite different things, causing the teacher to actually assume the role of researcher and of those who learn together.

But, however, however, nevertheless... the remote emergency model has its mechanisms that tend to inhibit the individual and cooperative work of discoveries, because the mediation by screens and the virtual learning environment as a repository of content and activities limits the work of the bad and old well-known formula of education. Of course, there may be alternative routes and ways of asserting ideas contrary to the false premises raised by the pandemic's isolation context. I even think that several fellow professors have already found these paths. On the other hand, I remain resigned, not finding ways to overcome traditionalism in the remote mode. In part, this is due to the relatively high number of subjects and the huge bureaucracy involved in the current role in course coordination. But, mainly, for abhorring remote interactions via computer or cell phone... the screen is tiring, the use of microphone and headphones is exhausting, and the immobility of the body also tends to hinder creativity. All that remains is to make use of reading activities, listings, surveys and forums, following the path outlined in the curriculum.

With all this, the nostalgia for a time not too distant arrives intense. Instead of investing hours in the search for a quality article, capable of provoking reflections on a particular topic on the menu, I would like to be with the students, blazing trails or even revisiting trajectories already taken, but with different perspectives. A latent example is the collective action planned in the Education, Culture and Society discipline, offered at the beginning of 2020 in the third semester of the degree in Physics. After a few weeks of discussions, utopias, planning and re-planning, we decided to carry out two major actions for the semester, starting with a very relevant topic in the course: women scientists and women in science. The theme would be developed through a six-week script, starting with a Generating

Conversation, going through a planned and mediated debate, followed by the production of a collective synthesis, which would generate the production of a collective mural, ending in a written review containing the lessons learned and a self-assessment.

Well, on Friday, 13 March 2020, we gathered in our auditorium about a hundred high school and college students to participate in the Generating Conversation. Teachers, women, mothers, scientists, researchers were invited... to share their experiences, difficulties, prejudices, confrontations, etc. There was a time to listen to them and a time to ask questions. It was just the first week of collective work on this topic. But if on Friday it was possible to carry out a pedagogical activity with a hundred young people in the same room, on Monday, 16 of March, this had already become highly dangerous from a health point of view. Since that Monday, therefore, we have followed the protocols of social isolation, adding not only this work on women in science, but many others. I can cite vegetable garden production as a metaphor for life and school, social research with teenagers about school, bullying, drugs, alcohol, sexuality, etc. These activities were mown down right from the start, leaving in the air the hope of becoming concrete someday. Thus, there is the contentment in knowing that isolation is a practice capable of saving lives, but also the heartache of leaving such learning practices behind.

We were left with the academic calendar suspended for a long time, until there was no other alternative but to resume, on an emergency basis, through virtual means. But then it would no longer make sense to continue with what had already been started. Not only because they melted into thin air, but because the limitations of technology would not allow them to perform such tasks that would mobilize not only cognition, but especially affection. In this way, we continued (regretting) the one-way teaching, sharing content, giving commands and checking if they were received and assimilated, placing them in two piles: yes or no.

As already outlined, the emergency remote modality limits actions, affections and the body itself. It takes away the dynamics of teaching and reduces learning to an individual activity, limiting collective learning to “group tasks” carried out through WhatsApp® groups and/or some other videoconferencing application. Furthermore, and perhaps the most harrowing and grievous element of it all is the fact that the internet-mediated model and its virtual access gadgets make it impossible to outsmart the teaching of what is not known.

Upon discovering, with Rubem Alves (1994), that this thing of teaching what is not known is not only possible, but essential, that I was finally able to find ways to provide an effective “down to classes”. Instead of posing as someone who has certain knowledge that is very important for the future of the students, I realized that I am someone who knows some

things, while at the same time ignoring countless others. And there is a huge gap between the known and the not known, so that it becomes much less boring and much more challenging to turn the class into a time when we share our ignorance. Together, we add our ignorance and set out in search of new knowledge. It was as recorded by Rubem Alves (1994, p. 67, our translation): “There is nothing more fatal to thought than teaching the right answers. For that there are schools: not to teach the answers, but to teach the questions”.

Just as examples, including those already listed in another text (FORTUNATO, 2021, in press), I learned the rudiments of the RPG game (Role Playing Game), the idea of gamification, and even how to produce a Physics Show. I also learned more about how education works within the prison system and Fundação Casa, or even about chronicles, capoeira and meditation. I found out a little more about soil care for planting a vegetable garden, cacti and succulents... well, I learned a lot and it became very clear how much I can still learn. In a similar way, students also report, each semester, their learning through these dynamic classes in which there is no teacher, but everyone becomes a teacher... and learners. I really miss this, because this dynamic of teaching and learning the unknown is not done through a remote emergency model mediated by virtual technology.

### **Final considerations, or 2021 and its becoming of hope**

*We are meeting at a moment of confluence of crises of extraordinary severity, with the fate of the human experiment quite literally at stake.  
(Noam Chomsky, Internacionalism or extinction, 2020).*

After rebutting some of the assumptions that emerged about the teaching profession and virtual education as an inevitable future and recounting the nostalgia for a time before the pandemic, it is time to conclude. Therefore, it is necessary to agree with Chomsky: we are at a crossroads, and we hope to come out of it alive, giving continuity to our planetary existence.

However, a warning is needed. It seems, throughout the text, that there is a latent desire to return to face-to-face, visceral education... Nevertheless, return becomes, then, a very expensive word in this context, as a return to normality is imagined or, as noted, quite often a premise of a “new normal”. Now, there is nothing normal about an exclusively cybernetic life, much less this highly contagious disease thing, driving people away. Here the crossroads mentioned by Chomsky becomes evident: either we have changed, or we are doomed to a return that will soon produce another virus or some war or some way of being against ourselves... even if it is just excessive production of stress and anxiety.

Therefore, we cannot ignore the words of Alexander Neill (1978), who wanted education to guide everyone to discover their best – not in terms of skills for work, but for what they like and feel good about doing. Still, Neill (1978, p. 34) was quite incisive in expressing that the world as we know it, in general, is “a great tenement”. Absurd numbers of people below the poverty line, without food, sanitation and health. Enslaved, smuggled people. Extremely high rates of deaths, beasts, caused by futility or greed. Deforestation, deforestation, space debris and plastic oceans... the list goes on, long. Thus, wishing for a return is just a return to face-to-face meetings, without the anguish of the machine.

It appears, however, that Chomsky's prognosis will not be taken seriously. Since the beginning of the isolation of the covid-19 pandemic, we have seen and heard that the world cannot stop, it must continue. Continue expanding the tenement seen by Neill, perhaps. Remote learning gives this idea of continuity, that you can't stop... you have to move on, going. Where? It's not well known, but it's likely to go on to the next stop, whether it's a new pandemic, or an even more gnawing post-neoliberalism, or some other way of attacking life.

I hope otherwise.

I hope that returning to the world of face-to-face education is the time to understand that there is another way for life to continue. More affective and less productive. Who knows?!

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