

## Conteúdo e forma da escola na perspectiva dos estudantes

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### Resumo

O artigo relaciona a forma escolar, tal como definida na literatura, com a percepção dos estudantes quanto à organização do trabalho escolar e pedagógico. A pesquisa de campo foi realizada em três escolas portuguesas com características diferenciadas entre si: duas de perfil tradicional sendo uma de localização periférica e outra voltada a setores sociais elitizados. Uma terceira escola foi selecionada por adotar métodos inovadores. Realizamos observações nas turmas, grupos focais com estudantes e entrevistas com docentes. O suporte teórico advém das perspectivas críticas, sobretudo Enguita (1989), o qual destaca o isomorfismo entre sociedade e escola burguesa. As escolas de perfil tradicional foram objeto de críticas pelos estudantes. A de periferia revela a formação para inserção social precária e um cunho assistencial, enquanto a escola voltada às elites mostrou-se mais enrijecida em seus métodos, sofrendo grande rejeição estudantil. Aquela com proposta pedagógica inovadora alcança algumas mudanças na forma escolar e atrai o interesse e o envolvimento dos estudantes. Concluímos que a escola precisa ser transformada radicalmente em seu conteúdo e forma para estar em sintonia com as novas gerações e os desafios da sociedade atual, mas o conjunto social igualmente precisa ser revolucionado pois, no limite, é este que modula o conteúdo, a forma e os sentidos que os sujeitos imprimem à escola.

**Palavras-chave:** Conteúdo e forma escolar. Teoria e prática. Trabalho.

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

School content and form. Theory and Practice. Work.

## School content and form from the perspective of students

The article relates the schooling form, as defined in the literature, to the students' perception regarding the school organization and pedagogical work. The field research was taken in three Portuguese schools with different contours: two of them having a more traditional line of work, being one of them peripheral and the other directed to an elitist social circle. A third school was picked due to its innovative methods. We observed the classes, focal groups counting on students and teachers interviews. The theoretical support comes from critical perspectives, mainly from Enguita (1989), who highlights the isomorphism between the society and the bourgeois school. The two schools with traditional outlines were criticized by the students. The peripheral school reveals unsteady social inclusion formation and charitable characteristics, while the elite-focused one appeared to be more strict in its methods, undergoing hard rejection from the students. The one presenting an innovative pedagogical purpose reaches to some schooling form changes and attracts the interest and the students involvement. We concluded that schools need to suffer a radical content and form transformation in order to be in balance with new generations as well as the current society challenges, but the social set also needs to be revolutionized because, in its limit the latter modulates the content, the form and the senses people imply to the school.

## Resumen

### Palabras clave:

Plan de estudios básico para la enseñanza de la escuela primaria. Enfoque histórico-crítico. Matemáticas modernas.

## Contenido y forma de la escuela por la perspectiva de los alumnos

El artículo relaciona la forma escolar, como definida en la literatura, a la percepción de los estudiantes con la organización del trabajo escolar y pedagógico. Los estudios de campo efectuaránse en tres escuelas portuguesas de distintos perfiles: dos de perfiles tradicionales, una de ellas ubicada en zona periférica y la otra dirigida para sectores sociales elitizados. Una tercera escuela fue escogida por adoptar metodología innovadora. Observamos las clases, grupos focales con estudiantes e entrevistas con maestros. El soporte teórico viene de las perspectivas críticas, sobretudo de Enguita (1989), que destaca el isomorfismo entre sociedad y la escuela burguesa. Las escuelas con perfiles tradicionales fueron criticadas por los estudiantes. La escuela de zona periférica revela la formación para integración social precaria y con característica asistencial, mientras la escuela destinada a las élites se mostró más rígida em sus métodos, sufriendo un grand rechazo estudiantil. Aquella con propuesta pedagógica innovadora logra algunos cambios en la forma escolar y atrae el interese y participación de los estudiantes. Cocluimos que la escuela necesita ser transformada radicalmente en su contenido y forma para que esté sintonizada con las nuevas generaciones y con los desafíos de la sociedad actual, pero igual el conjunto social necesita ser revolucionado porque, en el límite, es este el que modula el contenido, la forma y los sentidos que los sujetos imprimen a la escuela.

## Introduction

This study aimed to investigate the school form in different school profiles and the students' relationship with them. The field research was carried out in three schools in greater Lisbon, Portugal. Two of these schools are public, one targets poor students from peripheral urban regions, and the other is centrally located and has an elitist profile. Finally, a third school, private, elitist, and marked by innovative methodologies. We conducted the research in Portuguese territory because of their educational system, constituted under the determinations of the transnationalization of educational policies, and its close ties with the world of the economy in search of market efficiency (LEMOS, 2014), which, in our analysis, leads to the recrudescence of the bourgeois school form.

The bibliographic research leaned on the school form category in authors such as Enguita (1989), Vicent, Lahire, and Thin (2001), Pistrak (2018), and Shulgin (2013). We understand that the school, including its content and form, is historical. Therefore, it is permeable to the social logic in which it exists. However, even though the bourgeois school form is hegemonic, the school can also reflect different social struggles and projects in its school and pedagogical work. Thus, this study aims to discuss the school form in schools with different profiles, identifying common aspects and possible differences and how students experience and perceive such relationships.

Regarding the field research, we selected the mentioned school profiles, summarized here as periphery school, elite school, and school with innovative methodologies. We considered their location and method and obtained authorization to conduct the research. We conducted observations in five classrooms in the three schools. One 6th grade class, two 7th grade classes, one 8th grade class, and one 9th grade class.<sup>1</sup> We observed all class activities for a minimum of three full days in each classroom. In each classroom, we conducted a focus group with the students based on a previously established script of questions. Furthermore, we used interviews with teachers and directors or coordinators from the surveyed schools.

Apart from this introduction and the final considerations, the article is organized into two parts. In the first part, we present elements to locate the debate around school content and form. In the second part, we present the surveyed institutions and our field observations, especially the students' statements regarding their relationships with the school. Finally, in the final considerations, we rearticulate the theoretical debate with our observations, pointing out that other contents and school forms are possible and necessary.

## School Content and Form: a necessary debate

We have tried to apprehend the content and form categories as a dialectical unity of being, considering that one does not exist or manifest itself without the other. Instead, they require each other. Form and content do not exist in the abstract. They are always the expression of something concrete, and that actually exists, characteristics inherent to being. Being, according to Barata-Moura (2016, p. 328), "is always a process in becoming". It is not limited to tangible entities or the immediacy of the form in which it appears. Being is a "system of relationships". Even when objectified or phenomenalized, being "is not circumscribed to the existent". Instead, it has an array of real possibilities and an identity, and it is the same and the other in dialectical unity. In this framework, form and content are not immovable or absolute. They are the form and content of a being, always in process, in realization.

Every form is organically connected to the content. It is a way of linking the processes constituting it. Form and content are in organic correlation. They depend on each other, and this dependence is not equivalent. Content plays the determining role in content-form relationships. It determines the form, and its changes bring about corresponding changes to the form. In turn, form reacts over content, contributing to its development or restraining it (CHEPTULIN, 2004, p. 268).

When moving the debate above closer to our object, the school, we understand that it condenses content and form. Both are materialized in the relationships established inside the school, in articulation with the social relationships established outside of it. In other words, to grasp the direction of the education offered or exercised at school, we must identify the content of the relationships in which the students find themselves. Even though the relationships have unique aspects in each school unit, the current school institution carries with it a content and form that can shape, to a large extent, the relationships developed in the diverse school units.

The current notion of school content relates to the knowledge conveyed by the school, usually organized into subjects or courses. Thus, it refers to instruction and cognition. We depart from the understanding that this dimension makes up the school content but is not restricted to it. In a broad view, the school content refers to the meaning, the "why" or "what for" of the school's existence, and its effective meaning considering the totality of the relationships it incorporates or expresses. In this broad sense, the school content refers to its social function, the understanding we take on board. It is not meant to diminish the school's importance or that we would like it to have as a space for the socialization of accumulated knowledge. We emphasize that the school does not only transmit elaborated knowledge and culture, nor does it do so exclusively through cognition. The school content incorporates and goes beyond knowledge socialization or transmission.

Education and school are not disconnected from the social set, even though their relationships are not always direct and much less linear. Since at least the 1960s, critical theories

in education have pointed to the ties between the prevailing social structure and the educational structure. Bourdieu and Passeron (2008) and Petitat (1994) point out that school reproduces society. For Baudelot and Establet (1971), the school is dual, corresponding to the social duality outside it. For Manacorda (2000), the school provides the knowledge and behaviors required to train the labor force in capitalism. For Mészáros (2005), the school provides the technical and political frameworks for the capitalist system and promotes the alienation and indoctrination of the masses. For Freitas (2014), the school has the roles of excluding and subordinating the working class. Finally, from different perspectives, these authors show us that the school relates to the social insertion in the bourgeois logic, training for this logic, which includes a segregating and subordinating character toward large masses of the population.

Therefore, we can understand that the school contributes to social insertion (FIGUEIRA, 1985) within the bourgeois logic. However, society is not a homogeneous or harmonious unit. It is a society divided into classes and groups. For the majority, social insertion occurs within the working class, the dominated and exploited. The school distributes knowledge and promotes social insertion according to social classes, following the many existing social hierarchies. Its role simultaneously comprises inclusion and exclusion, participation and subordination. In other words, insertion and participation as workers in various forms, men and women, blacks, in the countryside, or the city. Exploited workers, whose participation takes place within the narrow confines of bourgeois citizenship. Subordinate insertion of the working class in the social set.

In summary, we can say that content crosses the school with an instructional dimension, which roughly consists of socializing the rudiments of science and culture (MANACORDA, 2000), articulated to an ethical-political dimension or socialization in bourgeois values and morals.<sup>2</sup> The bourgeois school content is the same for capitalists and workers (FIGUEIRA, 1985) because both live in the same society, even if on opposite poles. Therefore, this content undergoes important changes depending on the public it is aimed at. For the elites, the instructional content tends to be more structured, articulated, and in-depth. For the workers, it tends to be the more chaotic and fragmented the worse their economic and social conditions are. Moreover, both social classes must share bourgeois values and morals. However, these morals are more restricted for the workers, emphasizing obedience, persistence, and duties. Meanwhile, for part of the elite's children, these morals are more open, prioritizing creation, interpretation, and the debate of ideas, as shown in Enguita (1989).

The realization or, if you will, the socialization of this school content presupposes a form. It is realized through a form that is open to the content. That is, they are interdependent dimensions. It is often said that "the form, forms", which means that it is impregnated with content. For Manacorda (2000) and Rugiu (1998), the predominant educational form of the Middle Ages comprised learning through

practice, "learning to do by doing", directly at work, in the activity. On the other hand, the generalized school form under the capitalist production system represents a disruption from artisanal learning. School becomes the place to learn general, abstract content. What Vincent, Lahire, and Thin (2001) call the school form consists exactly of the separation between learning and doing, theory and practice. This form is generalized beyond the school, becoming a dominant characteristic of modern socialization.<sup>3</sup> This school form finds its best expression in the traditional pedagogical method, based on the teacher's exposition of general and abstract content the student must assimilate, using mainly the questioned repetition/memorization. However, for Enguita (1989), under the appearance that school teaches only through ideas and verbalization, there is a "hidden side": more than contents, the school teaches social relationships, a position corroborated by Shulgin (2013), for whom the school is a relationship.

For Enguita, the social relationships in education bear an isomorphism toward the bourgeois production relationships. Education and school teach "social relationships of production" (1989, p. 107) since the school is where such relationships are lived and not where they would only be verbally transmitted.

In the author's words, the school

is the scene of a web of material, social relationships. They organize the student's everyday and personal experience as strongly or more strongly than the social relationships of production do with the worker's experience in the factory or the small producer's experience in the marketplace (1989, p. 137).

Enguita (1989) identifies a set of characteristics that reveal the isomorphism between the school form and the bourgeois social relationships of production, such as submission, passivity, obsession for order, imposition of rules, hierarchization, simultaneous teaching and fixed groups corresponding to mass production, strict control of time and spaces, separation between theory and practice, verbalist and academic education. Still, according to the author, the student is alienated in the bourgeois school, in a way analogous to the worker in capitalist society. Let us dwell a bit more on this last aspect.

Based on the Marxist analysis of the worker's alienation from the product, the process, and the means of work, Enguita (1989) maintains that students are not alienated from the product of their efforts since knowledge undoubtedly belongs to them. However, they are alienated when it comes to determining the ends. In other words, the student is alienated when deciding what to learn, much like the worker who does not determine for what purpose or how much to produce. Regarding alienation in the work process, students and workers are equally alienated from the decision or knowledge of the means by which the ends will be achieved. Both lose control over their activity. Dates, times, and sequences are organized in such a "fragmented and normalized" way that the student not only has not planned but "is not able to understand" (ENGUITA, 1989, p. 175). Upon entering the place of study or work, students and workers

have their labor capacity made available to the teacher or the employer, and this capacity no longer belongs to them. According to the author, separating school learning from vital processes and accepting school work as something that does not belong to the student are part of learning and accepting the relationships that will be found outside of school.

According to Enguita, as far as learning is concerned, alienation from the means of production does not occur in terms of ownership as a material thing but in terms of control. The playgrounds are watched, the entrances are controlled, and classrooms and laboratories are closed when there is no activity. The principal's offices or the teachers' rooms are forbidden to students. Leaving the classroom or the school must be expressly authorized so that "everything serves to remind them that nothing is theirs", "the school territory is in no way their territory, they cannot dispose of it, just as they cannot dispose of themselves while they remain within its limits" (ENGUITA, 1989, p. 185). Thus, the students' relationship with the school space is equal, or even stricter, than that of the worker with the productive space.

Finally, Enguita addresses the time issue. Disrupting previous eras, the moderns establish a relationship with time in which it needs to be used, saved, measured, and controlled, a notion and perspective the school must teach and exercise. The author states that meeting precision is the basis for organizing the school day, which takes place within precisely defined time limits. The sequence of activities resembles seriation and prediction, from which propedeutic teaching and prerequisites are justified. The sense of progress with which school is generally associated enters the school dynamic if we look at the years of schooling as stages or as the accumulation of credits, grades, and so on. On the other hand, according to Enguita (1989), time as a value in itself is learned more than by its utilization, which, in school, is much wasted because time is converted into a universal value.

If in the production of goods, labor time is the value measure (MARX, 2017), in school, it is the value measure of knowledge. This is expressed, for example, "in the credit system that assigns equal values to subjects taken during equal periods, and thus makes values accumulative" (ENGUITA, 1989, p. 180), but also in the practical organization of the school schedule, in which subjects become equivalent because they occupy the same number of hours. In short, "school work, just like productive work, is reduced to abstract labor, to working time", so "school is the first setting where children and young people witness, accept, and suffer the reduction of their work to abstract labor" (ENGUITA, 1989, p. 180).

Abstract labor in Marx (2017) is stripped of all its concrete determinants, no matter what utilities it produces. Abstract labor determines the value of goods and is defined by the socially necessary labor time. In other words, by the quantum of labor embodied in the goods. In Marx's analysis, the exchange of different goods can occur by discovering



what they have in common: the labor time required to produce them. Thus, all concrete and useful characteristics are abstracted away in abstract labor, and human labor is reduced to a single variable, labor time. In Marx, abstract human labor designates the reduction to undifferentiated human labor, the expenditure of labor power that does not consider the form of this expenditure. It is a pure social determination and a specific characteristic of the capitalist production of goods (BRUSCHI et al., 2016).

Enguita's (1989) analysis indicates that something analogous occurs at school with student work. It does not matter if and how effectively the student has learned. The determinant is the time (attendance, number of semesters, credits, or years) allocated to schooling. The school disregards the concrete issues of students' lives, their interests and difficulties, and the meaning that knowledge can have. They must attain a volume of time and a grade, which can be achieved through mechanical memorization or even by cheating (such as cheating and copying), upon an imposed behavior and artificially maintained presence and interest (FREITAS, 2005). The school is more busy making its internal logic work and be assimilated than creating higher educational needs in the students. Fragmented and watertight knowledge, taught without articulation with life (PISTRAK, 2018), based on the separation of theory and practice, cannot develop a scientific worldview as a contradictory totality but a collection of dead knowledge abstracted from the lives of students.

Given such conditions that are still very present in school life, as students reveal to us below, it is not surprising to see disinterest, demotivation, and school denial. These are the ways that students express their opposition to reducing their work to abstract labor.

### **The surveyed schools and what the students say**

The research was developed in three schools in and around Lisbon, each with a different profile. We aimed to investigate the school content and form in schools that differed from each other. These differences were the very criterion for choosing the schools. Two of the three surveyed schools are public. One is located on the outskirts of Lisbon (School 1), serving a poor and marginalized population. The second school (School 2), also public, is located in the city's central region and is destined for the more elitist sectors of the population. The third school (School 3) was selected because its pedagogical proposal is considered innovative. Therefore, it has a greater possibility of changing the school form. This third school is private, located in a privileged location, and also has a very elitist profile.

Access to public school in Portugal is defined by where you live. Proof of residence is required to attend the nearest school. In this sense, the criterion of selecting the



school by location allowed us to approach the two fundamental social classes in capitalism. The peripheral school serves the peripheral population. In other words, it mostly serves the children of low-paid, underemployed workers, where social problems accumulate. The centrally located school, in the middle of the upscale neighborhoods of Lisbon, ensures that the origin of students is predominantly from high-income groups, a situation verified in the field research.

We emphasize that our criterion for selecting the schools did not depend on the type (public or private) but on the differences between them, considering the school/work/classroom ties and the school organization methods. These criteria were operationalized by the selection of peripheral and centrally located schools. The selection of the third school with an innovative method profile was necessary due to the research objective and to meet the criterion of including a school with differentiated methods. It comes about because schools that manage to break away from the bourgeois school form, even partially, are not easily found.

School 1 is a public school aimed at the peripheral population and is located in a city in the Greater Lisbon area, where low-income families live and where violence and drugs are more evident. The school claims to be inclusive, especially because it receives marginalized populations and seeks to welcome them. The school's physical structure is standard and reveals time marks, such as faded walls and lack of maintenance in the outdoor areas.

In School 1, there are classes of students in three types of curriculum, the regular, the Alternative Curriculum Plan (ACP), and the Vocational Curriculum (VC). The ACP classes have the same subjects as the regular classes. However, they are designed for students with learning difficulties and/or indiscipline, and who, due to needing a better performance and follow-up in the regular classes, are assigned to the ACP classes. In practice, the evaluation is made more flexible in these classes, and the contents are taught with little in-depth study. This school has only one VC class, in 9th grade. Furthermore, this class is aimed at students with greater difficulties and seeks to introduce subjects related to the labor world. Thus, it attracts students who are older and less suitable for school.

Parents' or guardians' work differs greatly between the regular and alternative curriculum classes. In the former, parents work as teachers, psychologists, and self-employed. Most of them have attended higher education institutions. In the differentiated curriculum classes, manual labor, poorly paid work, and parents in prison or involved with drugs are often present. Therefore, even though it is a school on the outskirts, there are classes aimed at the better-off population in the school's surroundings, revealing that the social division of labor is expressed in the organization of the students' classes. The life one leads outside school reflects inside the school, in the student's trajectory, evidencing that a great

part of the "learning" or "behavior" problems are broader social problems related to income, work, and living conditions.

The two classes with a differentiated curriculum express with greater evidence the exclusion internalized in the school and the search for compensating the social ills via education, turning them to the labor world or the permanence of the student in school by making the content and evaluation more flexible. We highlight the reception and follow-up that the school does in the most critical cases, as well as curricular and evaluative adaptations, etc., given the permanence of the marginalized sectors in school and their social insertion as workers, evidently as precarious workers. Moreover, we highlight the interest shown by the students in the food offered at school.

Our observations at School 1 leave no doubt that, in practice, the two curricula (ACP and VC) are aimed at students with greater social, emotional, and learning difficulties, consisting of an impoverished and flexibilized curriculum, aimed mainly at keeping the student in school, regardless of their actual learning. It is a clear example of school duality inherent in the broader social duality or what Kuenzer (2007) called "exclusionary inclusion".

In our assessment, the school is placed in a limiting situation where segregation and exclusion are the final destinations regardless of the path adopted. If the school does not separate the students, it does not favor the learning of those in a more favorable situation. It ends up increasing the failure and dropout chances of those in a more difficult situation because it will be more demanding in terms of content and discipline. By separating them, the school can keep them longer but ends up segregating them into classes where discipline and knowledge problems are magnified. Students stay in school longer, move up a grade, and may even complete the 3rd cycle<sup>4</sup>. However, it does not put them on a level playing field with those who have completed the 3rd cycle in regular classes. We understand that the permanence of these students in school and the conclusion of the basic education cycles end up being functional to the capitalist social system because it trains them for precarious work while at the same time, it allows for the mitigation of social problems, partially controlling their explosion.

In School 1, classroom-centered teaching and a great deal of teaching effort to develop the lessons stand out, especially in the two alternative curriculum classes. In these, there is no learning environment. Student autonomy and initiative are almost non-existent, noise is constant, and there is a huge learning gap. The student's two speeches expressing the relationship with the school, the social condition, and the future horizon are significant:

"School is boring and rotten" (Student, 7th grade).

"What do I want to be when I grow up? I want to be the king of thieves" (Student, 7th grade).

In a third class, called regular, in School 1, we find the most socially and school-adapted students. Here, the level of knowledge is noticeably higher, and there is a more suitable environment for study. However, the students' boredom is also there. This class managed to express strong criticism of the school in the focus group. Even though it is the most adapted class, it is the one that most questions the school structure. We ascribe this questioning to its ability to read the world, which is connected to its better economic and cultural condition when compared to the others. Here are some statements from the students in this class:

I think we are very much locked in the classroom while in the world or out there outside the classroom, we could learn so much more... There is so much out there, and we are just looking at a board and someone explaining while they could take us to these places to learn (Student, 7th grade).

At school, they are showing us that in the world, there is too much of a sense of hierarchy because, for example, if students want to speak out that they are unhappy about something, they are not going to be heard, even if it is a whole class talking (Student, 7th grade).

In history, we learn more "what" than "why" (Student, 7th grade).

What would you change in the world? The world! (Student, 7th grade).

The students' criticism of the school appears in the statements above, which question the isolation that the current classroom configuration promotes, indicating that the world outside the classroom is rich in possibilities. However, the school does not articulate these possibilities in teaching. They question the hierarchization, the students' lack of space to speak and be heard, and a teaching perspective based on isolated facts without the proper contextualization. The last statement signals that the world needs to be transformed, so there is an underlying conception that the problems are global and not localized. We consider these student speeches to be very lucid, capable of detecting aspects of the school's logic and how to overcome it, as suggested when they propose to articulate the classes with the real world, contextualized teaching, and giving a voice to the students. We cannot fail to notice that the students from the ACP and VC classes, whose testimonies were reproduced above, could not express more criticism of the school. Their statements reflect the impoverished cultural and economic context in which they live.

School 2, also public, is directed to the formation of the upper strata of the social hierarchy due to its history, location, physical structure, and pedagogical proposal. Continuity of studies is the synthesis of their work, hence the focus on content, testing, and external assessments. The teaching staff is stable and with several years of service, and for the most part, it assumes the essential traits of traditional pedagogy. The 8th-grade class reflects a different average than the others to the extent that it includes the students with the greatest difficulties in school. However, we were allowed into this class, which reveals the research difficulties in elitist schools. This group finds it more difficult to adapt to the school's method and is more resistant to it. We raise the hypothesis that in this class, there is a potential for problems that

are present in the other classes and whose tendency, in general in the school, is to increase, according to indications provided by some teachers. Students revealed great dissatisfaction with the school, particularly the lack of active voice and the teaching method.

School 2, since its high school days, has been geared toward continuing studies, with a high level of demand regarding content and discipline. The preparation for entry into Higher Education is highlighted as the main mark of the school and what defines its pedagogical proposal. The school adopts the traditional or classical method, which ensures the school's elitist status. There is great concern regarding the content volume and meeting the programs' full scope. The pressure of external exams, to which the school pays close attention, reinforces this perspective and confirms the adequacy of the Portuguese public school to market logic, as highlighted by Lemos (2014). One faculty member expresses these issues in a statement:

We, teachers, don't have much autonomy. The programs are closed, they limit us, and they have complex contents that I, as a teacher, am also capable of questioning why we are transmitting this. What is the effective interest in this? But it is a fact that in subjects with an external assessment, that is, national, we really have to meet that. We have deadlines (Teacher C).

Furthermore, there is the school's tradition and the profile of its teachers, who, according to the director, remain on their "safe ground", which "carries fewer risks". As a matter of fact, we observed part of the 8th-grade teaching staff with a very traditional profile, distant from the students, showing some harshness, not making use of dialogical methodologies, whose teaching is centered in the content, which is abstracted from its possible uses. According to students in focus group statements, some teachers "rush through everything" and only "tell them to copy."

Teachers really want to get their work done. There is no time for anything. Those who have learned have learned. Those who haven't learned can go to hell. Instead of the teacher taking the time to explain, no! He rushes through everything, and then we do poorly in our grades. When someone says they have a question, they say "we don't have time, we don't have time" (Student, 8th grade).

The physical structure corresponds to this elitization. The imposing, century-old central building consists of large rooms with well-maintained, classic-style furnishings and large windows. The school library is large and welcoming, with a wide variety of titles and classic books. The classrooms contrast the old building's high ceiling and large windows with their modern furnishings. Moreover, the school has four large laboratories, two for chemistry and physics and two for science and biology.

The classroom is organized into individual and rowed desks. This logic has stayed the same during the surveyed period. The students have their place in the classroom marked out in advance, the so-called class mirror. The 8th-grade school routine basically unfolds in the classroom. At the beginning of the work, the teachers put the lesson, its number, and its page on the board according to the textbook or manual adopted. The content of the different subjects was exposed, in the observed period, through orality,

*data show* projection, writing on the board, or reading the textbook. Including two classes held in the lab space, in which the lab was not used as such. The teachers stated that it is not possible to develop lessons with the lab equipment in this class because the students need to be more disciplined. On the other hand, the students stated that they wanted practical classes and labs, making the lessons more interactive. Therefore, the classes predominantly follow the expositive, teacher-centered model. The latter controls the word and often claims the centralization or coordination of the work. We did not witness any group work.

Most teachers exercise rigid, if not authoritarian, discipline. Some of them lean toward demanding absolute silence and attention from the students. As a counterpoint, we observe a lot of dispersion in the class, indisposition, complaining, and even a lot of side chatting and some disorder. In this context, it is frequent that teachers draw attention, some get excited, and there are many facial expressions of scolding and indignation ("frowning") from teachers. It is evident that students can barely stand much of the classes. While the teachers explain at the front, part of the class is distracted by drawings, cell phones, and conversations. Students frequently ask permission to leave the room to drink water or go to the bathroom. Even to throw something in the trash, the students ask permission. However, this attitude reveals more of an attempt to distract themselves and, at the same time, show respect for the rules. The content's exposure is often interrupted several times for the most different factors. Teachers frequently confiscate cell phones and return them at the end of class. In order to speak, students need to raise their hands, which only works sometimes. Students do not exercise autonomy or have the prospect of building it.

Given the unruly attitudes of the students, teachers constantly threaten them. Some teachers pass by each student's desk to check if they are doing the guided activity. However, when teachers turn their backs, the students transform themselves. Cheating is permanent, and the teacher's irritation is a constant. Students circumvent what is meaningless to them or those whose rules and operating dynamics, in this case, those of the school, they do not agree with. Teachers get angry because they do not have a class in front of them that wants to listen to them and behaves as they think it should. In this school, teachers and students appear incompatible, having opposing interests. The lack of effective dialogue is evident. Our observations show that the students feel repulsed by the classes and the teachers.

The theme of evaluation and, more precisely, of external tests and examinations is recurrent. According to Freitas (2014a), such tests standardize curricula and teaching methods. It reflects itself in daily school life, possibly intensified by the proposal and dynamics of this school. Evaluations are recurrent. The issue is a constant concern for students. I see them studying for the next class's History exam during Portuguese class. On this occasion, a student says he

needs to memorize because the test may ask about "one word", indicating the requirement for accuracy or copying. In the focus group, the students complained that the teachers teach the subject and then give them sheets to study at home, but they feel they need more support and study materials to talk to each other and discuss their doubts. According to the students' remarks during the focus group, the teachers say, "here are the pages, and now go untangle yourselves". But they add, "we forget what we have memorized after a day or two. We only study for the tests".

The issues we have addressed above regarding School 2 are expressed in the students' accounts:

School is death! (Student, 8th grade).

The school is too white (Student, 8th grade).

We are locked in a prison and can't do anything (Student, 8th grade).

Teachers really want to get their work done. There is no time for anything. Those who have learned have learned. Those who haven't learned can go to hell (Student 8th grade).

The school could make us feel more integrated (Student, 8th grade).

Our opinion doesn't seem to count. I think people should listen to the students a little bit. People forget that we are growing up. We need to talk, talk... (Student, 8th grade).

The line above, "School is death", indicates that the student who utters it finds no life in school. There is no joy or fulfillment there. As stated, the school and the teachers in School 2 appear repulsive to the students. It is not a healthy or conducive space for learning. In this direction, we understand the following line that states that "the school is too white" as referring to something dull, unattractive, lifeless, and too uniform. Similar to School 1, the students in School 2 feel trapped, without the right to speak or to be listened to. The students know they need to speak and express themselves, but the school does not make room for them. The statement that they do not feel integrated into the school reveals they are uncomfortable. They do not feel the school is their space, as Enguita (1989) had already highlighted, indicating that alienation is a learning that needs to be produced in a divided society.

Remember that the 8th-grade class surveyed in School 2 is considered a group of undisciplined and low-learning students. The school separates them into the same group, thus opening the way for the most suitable ones in the other classes to move on, fulfilling this school's project to educate top students who will continue their studies. The traditional way of teaching and school organization are the same for all classes, generating apathy and aversion in the students, as identified in the statements above. Although in the researched class, the aversion to school and indiscipline is pronounced, it is the space where the dissatisfaction with school logic is best revealed. However, somehow it expresses other students' feelings.

School 3 is a private school and operates as a cooperative of educators. The school was founded in 1970 in the context of the Modern School Movement in Portugal. Therefore, it is part of a social movement in the field of education aimed at overcoming traditional pedagogy and creating a

"modern school". According to Pintassilgo and Andrade (2017), the main influences of the School are found in Antonio Sergio, John Dewey, Célestin Freinet, João dos Santos, Henri Wallon, Matthew Lipman, and the Papy couple through the modern mathematics program for schools.

According to the school's principal in an interview, the school's initial idea was based on the cooperative organization of the classroom. About four years later, the school turned into a cooperative because "it was understood that it was not legitimate to ask children to work cooperatively if the adults here serving as role models did not do so as well".

The school is in an upscale neighborhood with tree-lined streets and a view of the Tagus River. The school offers Early Childhood Education to three-year-olds and the 1st and 2nd Cycles of Basic Education until the 6th grade. The research was conducted with the 6th-grade class<sup>5</sup>, noting that in this school, it was the oldest class and, therefore, best acquainted with the school's methodology. The 6th grade comprises 28 students, but the class is divided into Classes A and B, with 14 students each, for most of the classes. However, they can come together depending on the activity to be developed.

School 3 operates in two large old houses, adapted to the condition of a school, escaping the conventional architectural patterns. Furthermore, it has a green area and garden in the middle of which there is a small park and a large open space for children to play. Overall, the school is beautiful, as are the classrooms and other spaces. The classrooms are equipped with colorful desks and chairs for use in pairs and in an anatomical size for the children. We observed that the arrangement of the desks in the class varies depending on the activity performed. However, the format of a large table, circle, or small groups/stations is frequent. The physical structure includes a secretary's office and meeting room, a kitchen and cafeteria, an art room, a library, and other spaces where paintings and other works, as well as student works, are displayed. In the classrooms and cafeterias, there are large windows or glass doors that allow light to enter and the internal space to communicate more with the green area, offering a feeling of amplitude and freedom.

Its method is based on cooperation, dialog, and a more integrated perspective on knowledge. Furthermore, the children carry out small assignments at school. The observations indicate the overcoming of exclusively verbalist and simultaneous teaching. The teaching-learning process develops in a pleasant environment. The children show great participation and interest and seek to articulate knowledge with real situations. The school uses several dynamics and methodologies and frequently conducts study visits. Moreover, we observed changes in the school curriculum and the search for interdisciplinarity. These issues are expressed in the children's statements.



Everyone does their part. Some people clean the living room, others the bathroom and the hallways. This is community organization and cooperation. We are divided into several groups (Student, 6th grade).

It might even be a drag [hassle] having to clean the bathroom, but you have to get used to it (Student, 6th grade).

This school is different from the others. it is a unique and special school (Student, 6th grade).

This school has completely different learning methods from the others I went to..... group work, I like that a lot. In the other schools, they were very individualistic (Student, 6th grade).

In this school, we can suggest rules. We build the rules collectively (Student, 6th grade).

In this school, it's easier to learn because you don't feel like you're learning..... You're in a room, playing and learning, ..... then you come home and say, look, I learned this today (Student, 6th grade).

This school gives us time for ourselves and more break time, which also replenishes our ideas and clears our heads. And I think we learn more because the brain rests, and when the brain rests, we are more available to learn other things (Student, 6th grade).

The students' accounts at School 3 differ substantially from those at Schools 1 and 2. Here, they feel included, with real room to speak and participate, to the point of recognizing that they help construct the rules and that this school is different, "it's special". The students also recognize the teaching method as differentiated, which is expressed in the fusion between learning and playing, and in the statement that the school makes it possible to "clear your head". In other words, a school that promotes "teaching to think" and not "filling your mind" (ILIENKOV, 2007). Therefore, it is a school where students establish a different relationship with time and knowledge. Finally, the existence of work teams in the school and the involvement of students in self-service (serving snacks, cleaning the cafeteria and bathrooms, among others) reveals the concern with integral formation, feeling part of and responsible for the school and others, and with the construction of school collectivity, which is also highlighted by the student who says "the other schools were individualistic".

Indeed, it is a school that is not based on the traditional teaching method and shows signs of a different school form and content. These signs are revealed starting from: the physical structure that is not impersonal and that integrates the internal and external environment; the different ways of organizing the group that joins or divides and distributes itself in the class depending on the proposed activity; the more horizontal relations between students and teachers; the methods of dialogue, debate, questions, and research; the study field trips; the construction of rules; and the involvement of students in self-service. In this direction, we can mention shared classes between teachers and students' parents (most parents have higher education), the teachers' cooperative society, subjects such as Philosophy and Cinema for children, a large space for art at school, and other aspects.

## Final Considerations

This study aimed to investigate the school form in different school profiles and students' relationships with them. The research shows that in the two institutions with a traditional profile (Schools 1 and 2), in which the bourgeois school form is kept intact, the students reveal a great aversion to school.

Several students from these two educational units express in their statements criticism toward features of the school form as defined by Enguita (1989). Let us see. When students say that teachers "rush through everything" and that "they just want to get on with it, there's no time for anything", they show the reduction of their work to its abstract dimension. In other words, time takes on a value regardless of real learning. It is important to deal with the lists of content, the recurring evaluations, and the effective understanding of knowledge, which is relegated to a secondary position. The narrowing of teaching to what is required in evaluations increasingly subordinated to the market logic does not offer a solution to the problem of the student's relationship with knowledge. It persists or even reinforces the formalization of the work of teachers and students and, consequently, the absence of meaning for them.

In addition, abstract labor occurs by alienating the students regarding the purposes of their work, why, and for what purpose they study. It is expressed in the many demonstrations that the students do not see any meaning in what is being taught. In other words, if students do not understand why they study a certain content, they do not mobilize themselves adequately to learn it and relate to the knowledge in a mechanical, forcible, fragmented way. The challenge of teaching involves precisely articulating knowledge and its theoretical dimension to concrete life, enabling learners to locate the importance of elaborated knowledge in their lives and the society in which they find themselves (PISTRAK, 2018; ILIENKOV, 2007; LEONTIEV, 1983). When students propose to go beyond the classroom, "out there", that is, in real life beyond the school walls, or when they indicate that school should "teach more 'what' than 'why'", they are exactly looking for the meaning of the content taught, denoting that this meaning is not present. The students are very emphatic on this point. We remember their expressions and voice full of energy and resentment when touching on these issues.

The students noticeably pointed to the alienation they suffered regarding the means of their school work when they indicated that they do not feel part of the school, that they have no voice, and that rules are imposed. They are telling us that nothing there belongs to them, as Enguita (1989) had said, producing an estrangement between students and the teaching unit. But we remind you that this characteristic of the school form, and the others, is not a defect or dysfunction. Instead, it reveals its educational intentionality. When learning nothing is theirs at school, that they do not manage anything but owe obedience to orders, they learn bourgeois social relations. They learn at school how to behave as required of them in the labor

world. Aware that this form of school organization diffuses a form of social relationship, Pistrak (2018), in the context of the October Revolution, proposes student self-organization as a fundamental category in the construction of the Soviet Labor School, which, alongside labor and actuality lay the foundation for a new school content and form.

Except for the school with innovative methods, which proposes to review its content and form, the research allows us to conclude that students do not like school, particularly the reduction of teaching to lecture classes. The survey reveals that the school is distant from the students, and they develop an aversion toward it. Our observations indicate that school is, for many students in School 1 in particular, a space to nurture themselves, express their anger, seek welcome and affection, and above all, maintain hope for a better future. Many accounts, expressions, and behaviors show that the classes are boring or almost unbearable, in addition to the lack of meaning, cheating, etc. It does not mean that no learning takes place, but this is, as a rule, through mechanical, formalized processes, unrelated to the life and interest of children and teenagers. However, we cannot say that students do not want to learn. We saw curious students whose questions were not welcomed at school or did not find space to be asked. The bourgeois school form kills curiosity and effective student participation. The expositive teaching method is an efficient resource. However, when used in an almost exclusive, hierarchical way and without seeking connections with concrete life, it makes the school and the class heavy to bear, whose logic repeats itself endlessly.

The lack of motivation to study, the questioning of how teachers teach, the messiness, the distraction, and the cheating show the relationship between students and school and denounce the reduction of school work to abstract labor. In the end, as mass students, who do only what they have been ordered to do, it matters little whether they have actually learned the knowledge of the sciences, arts, and philosophy. They will succeed if they have completed the required amount of time (hours, credits, attendance) and achieved the required grade on the assessments. Let these have more of a grading purpose than evaluating and replanning the process, which is part of the school machinery. This structure does not go unnoticed by the students with whom we engaged in dialogue.

In Schools 1 and 2, where the bourgeois format is kept intact, classes are divided up, separating students according to their performance, which, particularly in School 1, is related to the families' socioeconomic status and their position in the labor market. Therefore, in the same school, the division of labor is reproduced in the division into classes, which aims to enable students with better performance to continue their course with greater chances of success. Meanwhile, the classes with learning and behavioral difficulties acquire welfare and formal permanence in school, reducing the learning that could effectively help overcome the peripheral condition. In School 1, a peripheral school, we observed they face a dilemma: either they group students with

more difficulties in so-called alternative curricula and, with this, aim at keeping them in school, even if with little learning; or they keep them in regular classes where they would be in contact with more knowledge, but whose chances of failure would increase. Therefore, schools and students find themselves in a limiting situation where the destination is exclusion and marginal insertion for the poorest layers of the working class, whichever path they adopt.

Quite different is the situation for students in the third type of school. This school, elitist by its socio-economic profile and differentiated by its content and form, presented itself closer to the students. They actually participate in some school decisions, are not confined to the classroom, and knowledge is delivered in an interdisciplinary way and articulated to the rich cultural life of the students beyond schooling. In School 3, we observed greater unity between theory and practice, and the students' activity did not strongly show the marks of abstract labor. Therefore, this educational unit is, in some way, the continuity of the life one leads outside of school, and both appear as almost a delight. Despite its private and elitist character, it indicates that school can be a rich space for education from an integral perspective and for access to knowledge elaborated in articulation with students' lives, especially when human relationships acquire richer content inside and outside school, going beyond abstract labor.

It is important to consider that School 3 is innovative because its origin is linked to the Modern School Movement in Europe. Thus, it is part of a context of social mobilization for a new kind of school. Unfortunately, the achievements of this movement were quite restricted to elite schools (SAVIANI, 1999). Our research covered two elite schools, one of which, School 2, reproduces quite faithfully the bourgeois school form, a form connected to the way of being of the school in capitalist societies and not a type of school intended for the bourgeois. It is the predominant form of teaching and education in the current society, where both bourgeois and workers are trained. The change in the school form goes through the social struggle that opposes the logic established in the school and outside it, pointing out that another school is possible. However, it takes an intentional, collective, and persistent movement in this direction.

The survey provided a small space for students to express themselves. The fact that the researcher was an adult from outside the school environment, a foreigner, which introduced herself as a researcher and ensured the confidentiality of the information made them comfortable to express themselves. The focus groups revealed the students' eagerness to speak and be heard. It shows that they have a lot to say, surprising us with their ability to elaborate in many moments. Under these aspects, the school underestimates them. In the focus groups, as the accounts indicate, they denounced the school on many issues, such as the lack of democracy in decisions and the use of the word, the confinement in the classroom, the content-based approach, the disrespect toward the students, the existence of prejudice and persecution, etc. In the relationships they are engendered, students perceive complex concepts that

educational theory formulates from these very relationships.

We conclude that the school, as it is, is an expression of the bourgeois society, its organization, and its contradictions. Both critical educational theory and the students' statements point to these contradictions. The research indicates that the school needs to be radically transformed to be in tune with the new generations and the challenges of living in an increasingly complex and contradictory society. However, the social set also needs to be revolutionized because, in the end, it modulates the content, the form, and the meaning individuals give to school. Students demonstrate a desire to learn and develop, especially when their environment challenges them in this direction.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Equivalent to the 6th, 7th, 8th, and 9th grades in Brazil. The Portuguese education system is organized in cycles. After Early Childhood Education, the students go through the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd cycles, corresponding, in Brazil, to the initial and final years of Basic Education. On the other hand, Brazilian High School corresponds to what is called Secondary School in Portugal.

<sup>2</sup> The argument above does not ignore the importance of schooling to workers, who have fought and are fighting for access to schooling and bringing education closer to their class interests. As we pointed out, the school is articulated with the social set, which includes its contradictions and struggles. Our analysis is based on the necessary articulation between the school, its form, content, and the society in which it is located. It is also based on the need for the emancipatory social struggles to build other parameters for the school consistent with the social life they propose to construct.

<sup>3</sup> For Vincent, Lahire, and Thin (2001), paradoxically, the school seems to pay the price for the generalization of its form of socialization, being the target of numerous questions. However, according to the authors, the answers to the limits of school comprise the continuous repetition of the school form in further schooling. We highlight two criticisms of Vincent, Lahire, and Thin's formulation of the school form. They are: PAULUS (2013) and CATINI (2015). The first suggests that the school form is not invariable but depends on each unique situation, that is, on how the actors do it. The second questions the impermeability of the concept of school form to social classes.

<sup>4</sup> The conclusion of the 3rd cycle in Portugal corresponds, in Brazil, to completing Basic Education.

<sup>5</sup> In this class, the students are children, unlike the other classes and schools surveyed. The students' age factor has repercussions on their relationship with the school, which is not disregarded here but is also connected to other factors, such as the students' social condition and the school's pedagogical perspective.

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