

The Organicity between the Crisis of the Brazilian Public University and the Professors: Impact on Social Functions

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Abstract

This article presents a reflection on the organicity between the crisis of the public university and the crisis of the teaching profession, showing that it can affect the social function of both, thus transforming them. Based on historical-dialectical materialism, we seek to point out the contradictions that permeate the re-signification of these social functions, indicating that through praxis (action-reflection-action) it is possible to elicit actions of resistance in the quest to overcome the alienating circumstances involved in this transformation. The focus on the understanding of the epistemologies that support the conceptions of both processes - alienation and emancipation - tends to aspire and create the new, to produce the counter-established and to redeem the socially useful, and to transform value to the social function of both.

Keywords: gainst hegemony, public university, teaching work, teaching social function,

1. Introduction

There is a phrase by Barnett (2005) that carries an undeniable truth about the Brazilian public university: "a brave new world beckons to the university", making it a captive of public policies and social transformations, implying in the dismantling of its political and scientific positioning in today's society. There are several theoretical frameworks that reveal the conditions that are imposed, among them Chauí (2014) and Santos, (2011), which opened up the malicious effects of neoliberal logic, assuming that it does not aim to achieve only the social function the university, but also that of teachers who work in the formation of sociability.

The "brave new world" reserves to the public university a strong and fearful social, political and economic crisis, implying the presence of a series of difficulties that affect its social function. As our main focus is on the function of social teaching, the impact caused by the imposition of neoliberal logic on teachers' actions is visible and frightening. From a university managed by the savage mercantile logic, we have a professionalization and teaching work, managed by educational policies that have turned them into focused on economic profitability. This brings down aspirations and actions for a human-centred education and its emancipation, imposing the hegemony of pragmatic utilitarian education, which tends to infect society itself in its various social segments.

According to Chauí (2003), we understand that the crisis of the Brazilian public university has its historical milestone in the 1990s, when the country underwent major socio-political transformations orchestrated by international organizations. However, earlier in this decade, the start of this crisis could already be glimpsed. During the military regime, in the 1970s, the university showed its first crisis that made it functional. That is, it aimed at the light training aimed at qualifying the workforce; in the 1980s, derived from redemocratisation, it became the University of Results, that is, management-oriented and evaluated by productivity indexes. Under the focus of the expansion of higher education, in the same period, the partnership between public and private universities was established, according to business interests, demanding that the university must become flexible and competitive; and finally, in the 1990s, it succumbs to the deliberations that make it operational, assuming new operating characteristics that have generated new meanings regarding its social and scientific role, disqualifying it from its democratic and emancipatory identity.

The process that disqualified it as a social institution imposed an organizational structure (Chauí, 2003) that characterised it as a place of intense contradictions. Currently, Santos (2011) adds that the university is dealing with three more internal crises: of hegemony, legitimacy and institutionality, which alter its attributions and its

social role, especially regarding its relationship with society and the State, as well as in establishing academic and professional practices. According to Santos (2011), the crisis of hegemony deprives the public university of its formative and intellectual place, protected for critical thinking, the production of knowledge, and humanistic and professional formation; the crisis of legitimacy segregates the university system by disqualifying the omnilateral university formation. The crisis of its institutionality refers to its loss of autonomy, facing its nature of public good related to social responsibility.

These crises subject the university to political and ideological deliberations, which receives new attributions that relate it to the processes of conformation and articulation with the process of productive restructuring of capital. It had to work for the maintenance of the dominant social interests of our historical epoch, dismantling its identity, and its principles directed toward social justice and democratic citizenship. The university was delegated the function of meeting the new demands of qualification of the market of work, which transformed not only the formative processes, but also the knowledge produced there, which is now proposed as being homogeneous and hierarchical.

The changes aimed to implement a new national education project, which historically appeared between the 1980s and 1990s, when they were already prominent in educational policies, at least in the form of two visions of education: one aimed at democracy and social opportunities with some weight given to the defence of social justice; another, which privileged the preparation of people for the world of work, in an individualistic perspective, and to adapt to the economic demands. Among these two visions, the following should be more instrumental, with objectives expressed in quantifiable goals, the adequacy of the curricula to help reach these goals, the institutions' accountability, the differentiation of the work of the teachers. It results in the proclamation of an education that would unify the ideological perspective around criteria of effectiveness and profitability, the same imposed the hegemony of utilitarian pragmatism and functional immediacy, whose result was the manipulation of the consciousness of the subjects, among them the teachers who have become practically incapable of a position of resistance in the face of the neoliberal avalanche in education. To summarise, actions were taken that deliberately sought to change the social function of both university and teachers, extinguishing the possibilities of critical and emancipatory political and pedagogical action.

The university starts to assume a mercantilist bias, concerned with adapting to the demands of the market. Gradually, it alters the formative processes, curricula, programs and activities, focusing on theoretical, political, cultural and epistemological contributions that underpin the changes. This gave centrality to the teaching activity that, in the case of public higher education, was exposed to negative conditions related to its evaluation, regulation and control.

In fact, it was understood that the teaching action is related to the ways in which social practices are formed, which is committed to how the cognitive, affective and moral development of the subjects occurs, with the formation of personalities, in social, pedagogical and cultural terms, as expressed by society. Thus, taking into account the influence of teachers in relation to social, cultural, historical and institutional factors, both their control and that of the university were sought, with a strong belief that, together, the university and its teachers could make feasible political ideas for the maintenance of social order.

In the process, both the teachers and universities lost autonomy, whether in terms of teaching, research and extension, being kept linked to standardised assessments, control of resources through notices, awarding of prizes (objectives and symbolic), intensified exacerbation of their activities, subject to fragmentation, reified in a social plan that intensifies their crises, embellishing the tragic framework of teacher training and leading to crisis conditions of the social function of teachers.

They are times of managed work that increasingly fragments the social function of the university and that of teachers, demanding reiteration of the crucial importance of Marxist theory to enable readings and objective actions of the materiality of hegemonic educational projects. Thus, if the changes imposed on the university are organically generating restrictions to its institutional and historical-social practice, and also distressing the transformative potential of the teaching activity, the dialectical approach stresses the possibility of contradiction and resistance. Teachers take the place of (ideological) centrality in educational policies, not because they are anachronistic, but "because they can refuse reconversion, they can announce the new, they can form children, young people and adults in the fields and cities that question the present social order, think historically, and architect the future and the transition to another social order"(Libâneo, 2017).

Thus thought, the dialectical base that inspires new meanings, impelling resistance to the various conflicts that affect the way the university and teachers assume their social function. It also leads us to problematise the objectives of the dominant ideology, highlighting how the epistemology of practice was assumed, as a theoretical contribution of the instrumentalization of teachers, taken as a work force in favour of hegemony, whose intention is to hamper, on a growing scale, the critical thinking skills.

2. Epistemology of practice: the basis of the commoditisation of the social functions of the university and the teachers

In the midst of the process of the commercialisation of public universities, both education and teaching work become commercialised. They came to be seen as products to be consumed. Education and teaching work are displaced from the level of cultural right, embedded in the role of the goods that make up the market, and are called to meet the requirement of new professional profiles and labour, increasingly qualified and with certain skills.

In the process, the university has its social function transformed. In the same way, the educational action loses its ontological character, when turning predominantly to the technical aspect, to the detriment of the possibilities of promoting a critical and emancipatory formation. These same effects extend to the construction of knowledge, which sustains a consensual terrain around deliberations supported by the epistemology of practice. This is focused on neutrality and apolitical positioning, generating what Moraes (2001) called a "retreat of theory", which confronted not only the production of knowledge but also the formative processes, as we shall see (Magalhães and Souza, 2018).

The emphasis placed on the instrumentalising dimension of university, teacher training, and the production of knowledge, responds to a conception that privileges practice to the detriment of theory, supported by the epistemology of practice. This epistemological basis, according to Neves (2010), argues that ideological consensus necessarily passes through an education for agreement on "ideas, ideals and practices suited to the private interests of large national and international capital." The author names this type of education as Pedagogy for Hegemony, a strategy of Third Way policies. In the author's words, it is:

[...] a social legitimacy strategy of bourgeois hegemony, the Brazilian State, as an educating state, redefines its practices, establishing, through a pedagogy of hegemony, a new relationship between state apparatus and civil society, with a view to stabilizing, in the Brazilian space, the neoliberal project of sociability (Neves, 2005).

As a strategy for the consolidation of the bourgeois project in the country, the Pedagogy of Hegemony consolidates pedagogical practices that deal with the formation of subjects, as a reinforcement of the consent of new neoliberal deliberations. This logic assigns a new profile to the social function of teachers, which does not involve raising possibilities for awareness and emancipation. This epistemological choice ends up generating the impossibility of hegemonic suppression of the political and ideological character of domination.

Contradictorily, the teacher came to be criticised and blamed for the failures of education, claiming that they were too content, and they disjointed educational reality. Several tensions and conflicts were reinforced for teachers, who realised that the issue involved much more than the aspects of their work, implied in their social function and in the way in which they should act in the new education project. It should legitimise and reproduce the conditions of the system of production and class relations. Its social function would be to transpose proposals and indicators used in the business sector for education, such as: efficiency, effectiveness, competence, competition, flexibility, productivity, training, information system, performance validation, statistics, helping to consolidate a logic that has declared the teacher as an input of capital.

The political agenda for the formation of teachers and, supposedly, for the control of their social function, has acquired the character of urgency, permeating the discourses, reifying the education, without changing, however, the established logic of power and control. The ideological process easily gained supporters and advocates who were engaged in strengthening the epistemology of practice, as a theoretical basis of the materiality of tensions and contradictions, put to the teaching work. If the multiple problems faced by teachers were made visible, the same was not true of the circumstances of their alienation.

The constituted political, social and epistemological relations were defining the new objective and subjective conditions of the teaching action. The subjective ones have become very relevant in the present working conditions of the teachers of the public university. They lead to illness, the desistance of the profession, the depoliticization, reconversion and deprofessionalisation of the teachers.

This reality is shared with private universities that impose on teachers' classroom-based work contracts, generating a situation that does not seem less draining to teachers of those institutions. The objective conditions involve from actions that devalue the teaching work, through teaching, research, extension, to the draconian requirements of the current CAPES/ Brazil Collection, with their productivity indicators that regulate how much, and how the teacher must produce annually, independently of their way / style of work. The quantity and quality indicators are defined by the Qualis of each area, which standardise the publicity spaces in scientific events and publication vehicles and give rise to an evaluative scale. If the teacher does not score favourably, they are harmed, which also damages his graduate programs, which are currently under the tutelage of the Sucupira Platform.

The current historical and social context in which the multiple determinations imposed on universities and, consequently, on teachers are built and maintained, requires that we work intensively to meet the requirements. And in this sense, public university teachers often do not have the time or the conditions to prepare or improve their class, to update themselves and to innovate their practice. As the movement is organic and recurrent, we have the massification of established standards, as well as the perverse standardization of individualism, which dismantles the academic collectivity.

The organicity between the crisis of the Brazilian public university and the crisis of teachers, as already mentioned, turns both into agents of the disaggregation of the academic environment, which is well in keeping with the spirit of our age that imposes individualism as a de-characterization of social functions. In this context, we assume the epistemology of praxis as a possibility to raise new avenues for overcoming historical contradictions, put to the university and teachers. We take it as an emancipatory category against hegemony, whose principles help to face the limits imposed on the social function, since it generates knowledge capable of helping the subjects in the confrontation of the current regulatory forces.

3. Epistemology of praxis: mechanisms of resistance to mercantilisation of the social function of university and teachers

The social function of the university and teachers has serious implications for training for work and for citizenship. As defined by Marx (1983), its achievement requires a solid theoretical-pedagogical formation, necessary for the constitution of conscious and emancipatory activity, capable of social transformation. To think about the social action of the university and the teachers from the perspective of the epistemology of praxis implies assuming the necessity of one of the materialistic dialectic, in the support of an indivisible ontological and gnosiological identity capable of combating the neoliebraic impositions. The ontological dialectic demands the construction of the movement of history in its complexity, its dynamics, contradictions, conflicts and transformations; the gnosiological dialectic responds to the principles and values, the assumed conceptions of the world. In their interlocution we have a relational dialectic that is explained by Severino (2003), as that which clarifies "the articulations of the collective existence of men to change it." In this broad and philosophical sense, relational dialectics maintains its own epistemological status that causes the subject to seek out and position itself in the face of societal determinants regarding its evolution, contextuality and temporality"(PaesNeto, França, Furtado, 2017).

In terms of epistemological reflectivity, we have that the epistemological basis becomes a political position, when it helps to inquire about the role and values that are involved in the actions of the university and the teachers and from which vision of reality they act. The choice for the epistemology of praxis also refers to the assumed political-ideological position, this means assuming a social, political, cultural, ethical and academic connotation (Orso, Malanche and Castanha, 2017) capable of sustaining the resistance movement against hegemony, because it requires new forms of engagement in the struggle for transformations of neoliberal logic, as Souza, Magalhães and Queiroz (2017) have also reinforced. From the formative point of view, the epistemology of praxis expresses the indissociability between theory and practice, it requires a critical posture that, according to Marx and Engels (1979), belongs to the emancipated subject, which runs explicitly on the terrain of consciousness, therefore, it sustains the critical-dialectical vision (Saviani, 2017) of reality. Because it is different from the critical-mechanistic view, dialectical criticism demands a restless and articulate position to a counter position of the dominant ideology, without removing the movement and the contradiction.

Without the critical-dialectical vision, the social functions of the university and the professors become impotent, as Frigotto (2016) has also announced, which strengthens the existing order. At the edge of the classroom, through the mediating function of praxis between teacher, student and knowledge, one can re-establish the link

between the social and historical meaning of training, which does not only mean preparing young people for the work, but for the productive, conscious, truly public life.

In addition, the epistemology of praxis favours not only conceptual and theoretical changes, but the foundations on which other types of thinking and practice can be constructed. It rescues the certainty that the social function of the university and of teachers will once again contribute to the appropriation of higher reference systems, linked to emancipation and autonomy. A movement that allows widening of opportunities for those involved in the teaching-learning process, considering the potential development of all those who participate in a class (Vygotsky, 1984). If the changes imposed on the university decline its transformative potential and that of teacher action, from the perspective of the epistemology of praxis, the meanings and meanings of its social functions are amenable to transformation, as suggested by Freire (1998). The movement of praxis leads to the establishment of new relationships, it rescues the autonomy inherent in the social function of both. Let us recall what Marx and Engels (1979) have stated, that "[...] circumstances make men as much as men do circumstances."

4. An Inconclusive Synthesis

The problematization of the tensions placed on the social function of the public university and the teachers, understanding that they are organically managed by the dominant logic, is quite effective in the emancipatory sense, since it unveils the intentions put towards the consolidation of a new neoliberal education project. In contradiction, the same avenues of socio-political historicity that now oppress the social function of university and teachers, are capable of generating a more active and critical position, transforming their conditions of proletariat and oppression.

The focus on the understanding of the epistemologies that support the conceptions of both processes - alienation and emancipation - tends to aspire and create the new, to produce the counter-established, and increasingly, to redeem the socially useful and transforming value to the social function of both. The understanding of the capital agenda and how it develops actions to generate changes in the essence of the university, and of teachers, arms both the university and the society to the struggles of today and those that is to come. In order to overcome the various conflicts that have an organic repercussion on the social function of universities and teachers, paths are needed toward clarifying hegemonic interests and strengthening the denunciation of the harmful consequences that may result from them. We affirm that antagonistic, transformative interventions are inscribed in the assumption of the epistemology of praxis, which reveals the contradictions that permeate both university and teacher education, in which the commitment to the formation of critical consciousness stands out. We conclude by stating that despite the gloomy climate that plagues the public university, there is still enormous potential for struggle and resistance in its context, expressed among teachers, and among students, who show clear militancy in defence of the right to quality public education. These aspects are reinforced by the meaning of the possibility of praxis (action-reflection-action), capable of acting in overcoming the alienating circumstances of the social functions of the university and of the teachers.

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