



The “School Effect”: A historical debate in defense of an optimistic view of education¹

Efeito Escola: Um debate histórico em defesa de um olhar otimista sobre o ensino

El “Efecto Escuela”: Un debate histórico en defensa de una visión optimista de la educación

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Abstract

The “school effect”, understood as the share of responsibility that the school adds to the students’ learning, has been the subject of a profound debate in the field of social studies over the last few decades. However, the subject is still poorly understood, and it is common to find texts that organize theses with conflicting conceptions of theorists on this subject. In a way, there is a great duality of thought on the subject: on the one hand, a number of researchers who defend that the school is not able to overcome the barrier of sociological factors; on the other, those who point to the important influence of the school on student learning, even in challenging contexts. In this work, we defend the idea that the school effect does exist, and we revisit the history of this theme, confronting its main theories already conceived and contextualizing them with the reality of Brazilian basic public education.

Keywords: School effect. Basic education. Public education.

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Resumo

O efeito escola, entendido como a parcela de responsabilidade que a escola agrega ao aprendizado dos estudantes, tem sido tema de profundo debate no campo dos estudos sociais ao longo das últimas décadas. No entanto, o assunto ainda é pouco compreendido, sendo comum encontrar textos que argumentam suas teses com concepções conflitantes de teóricos dessa temática. De certo modo, há uma grande dualidade de pensamento sobre o tema: de um lado, uma parcela de pesquisadores que defendem que a escola não é capaz de transpor a barreira dos fatores sociológicos; de outro, os que apontam importante influência da escola na aprendizagem dos estudantes, mesmo em contextos desafiadores. Nesse trabalho, defendendo a ideia de que existe, sim, o efeito escola, revisitamos a história desse tema, confrontando as suas principais teorias já concebidas e contextualizando-as com a realidade da educação pública básica brasileira.

Palavras-chave: Efeito escola. Educação Básica. Ensino Público.

Resumen

El “efecto escuela”, entendido como la parte de responsabilidad que la escuela añade al aprendizaje de los alumnos, ha sido objeto de un profundo debate en el campo de los estudios sociales en las últimas décadas. Sin embargo, el tema aún es poco entendido, y es común encontrar textos que organizan tesis con concepciones contradictorias de los teóricos sobre este tema. En cierto modo, existe una gran dualidad de pensamiento sobre el tema: por un lado, una serie de investigadores que defienden que la escuela no es capaz de superar la barrera de los factores sociológicos; por otro, otros señalan la importante influencia de la escuela en el aprendizaje de los estudiantes, incluso en contextos desafiantes. En este trabajo, defendemos la idea de que el efecto escuela sí existe, y revisamos la historia de este tema, confrontando sus principales teorías ya concebidas y contextualizándolas con la realidad de la educación básica pública brasileña.

Palabras clave: Efecto escuela. Educación básica. Educación pública.

Introduction

Education, in its most comprehensive and historical concept, can be understood as the process of acculturation and learning of subjects in the world. This means that to educate is the most fundamental human social activity, in which the older transmit to the younger the necessary knowledge to deal with reality; moreover, it means to know themselves and to comprehend their condition in such reality (FREIRE, 1996; 2008). Without this, our existence as subjects that belong to a human society would be unfeasible.

For many centuries, it was exclusively up to the family (or social group) to educate their children and adolescents. However, from the 21st century onwards, at least in the West, the role of education was gradually transferred structurally from families to organizations. These organizations, biased by an ideal that children should have universal and free access to education, were consolidated in the form of the schools we know today. Over time, these schools passed under the tutelage of the State, and they were grouped together in the form of a formal public education system. (SAVIANI, 2013; BRESSAN; 2013)

Along with this process of educational systems development, many theoretical perspectives emerged, and they addressed how the socioeconomic context of students influences or even determines the level of learning that the school is capable of providing. In other words, these theories, in general, aim to explain how the student performance is related to the students' socioeconomic factors. These approaches can be classified into two large groups: a pessimistic and an optimistic one.

On the side of the pessimists, Bourdieu and Passeron (1975) proposed the idea that the role of the school would only be to perpetuate the current class structure. In turn, Coleman's study (1966) was interpreted as a revelation that the school would be unable to overcome socioeconomic barriers.

Against the pessimistic current, the theory of the school effect began to rely on researchers who brought a positive look at the role of the school. Observing the performance of schools and contextualizing them by their socioeconomic factors, even understanding that these factors had a great impact on teaching, the theorists of the school effect signaled that only through quality education it would be possible to overcome social problems (HANUSHEK, 1986; MENEZES, 2018; MENEZES, MORAES and DIAS, 2020). Still on the side of the optimists, we have Professor Paulo Freire, with his social-critical proposal of content, which defends an emancipatory pedagogical activism.

Standing on the side of optimistic proposals, this article aims to defend the possibility that current schools are organizations capable of transmitting the necessary knowledge so that individuals exercise with efficacy the skills necessary for a full and emancipated adult life. For this, we bring in this text the discussion, in the form of a historical-theoretical dialogue, of some of the main theoretical constructions that emerged from the 1960s on the school effect, contextualizing the debate with the Brazilian educational reality.

Four authors are placed on opposite sides in this debate. On the one hand, we confront Coleman's studies with those of Hanushek, two seminal researchers who quantitatively address the school effect, using the latter to defend the school effect, based on notes on the problems of the approach used by the former. Next, we rival the sociological conceptions of the school through Freire's optimism to confront the pessimism engendered by theories of reproduction — mainly the conceptions proposed by Bourdieu.

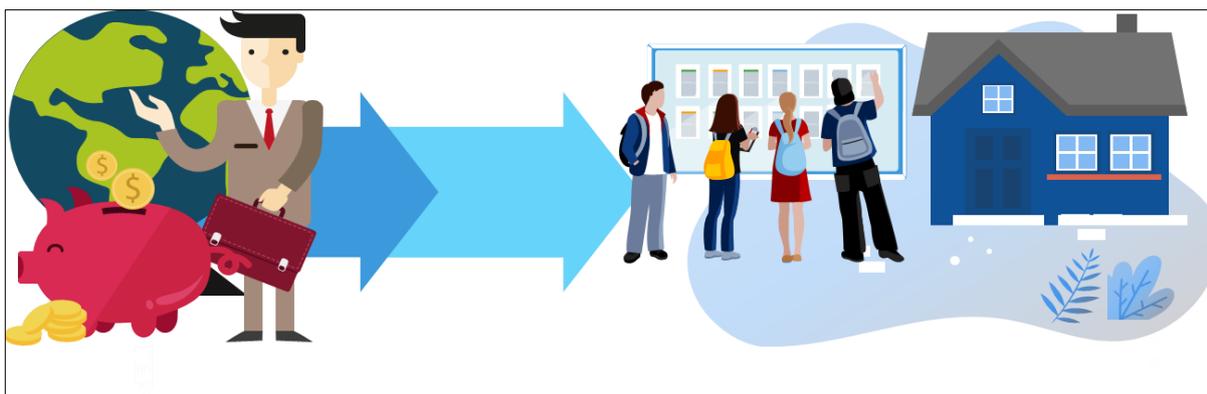
In defense of an optimistic look at school organizations

The school, understood from an organizational point of view, consists of a set of people and resources organized for a common purpose, thus being one of the fields to which organizational science researchers dedicate themselves (MISOCZKY and MORAES, 2011). However, it is emphasized that the school is not merely a simple organization, since it can be impelled to various roles. In fact, we could even say that the school is the most important of organizations, for its responsibility of preparing for the world of life, by developing skills and generating reflexivity on present and future actions (GULLAR, 1983; SAVIANI, 2013; PARO, 2017; FREIRE, 2008; DA SILVA e MESQUIDA, 2022)

Specifically, organizational studies are responsible for analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of organizational practices that occur at schools (MORAES *et al.*, 2020), without entering the field of pedagogical sciences – “the field of knowledge that deals with the systematic study of education” (LIBÂNEO, 2001, p. 6). This is mainly due to the investigation of the correct use of available resources and the application of high-level organizational practices (LEITHWOOD, 2009; DAY *et al.*, 2011a; DAY *et al.*, 2011b; DAY *et al.*, 2016)

It turns out that this understanding was not always accepted, as the first major studies that focused on understanding the relationship between the school and student performance reached factual conclusions that the school would be unable to overcome socioeconomic barriers. That is, these pessimistic theoretical proposals stated that regardless of the quality of the educational service offered, a given student would have the same performance. Because, in fact, what would be able to determine the student's performance would be only their socioeconomic conjecture (COLEMAN, 1966; BOURDIEU and PASSERON, 1975, 2012; BOURDIEU, 1989, 1998, 2005, 2007). In general terms, the school would then be without effect and determined by society, as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8 - Illustration of the determination of the school by society.



Source: Developed by the authors.

This pessimistic idealization of the school was strongly defended in the United States by theorists in the field of economics and administration, with Coleman's study (1966) having a central role in promoting this conception. Coleman (1966) prepared a report that was commissioned by the US government, with the aim of investigating the inequalities of the education system in that country. The report's main findings had significant repercussions, as it was concluded that the resources applied at school had little effect on school performance. On the other hand, the factor that would most explain the results achieved by the students was determined by the socioeconomic characteristics of the families to which these students belonged (COLEMAN, 1966; SALEJ; 2005; SILVA, 2021).

Indeed, Coleman's (1966) report was of great importance to the field. Going far beyond previous studies, Coleman correlated the characteristics of the school, students and their families with students' academic performance. Thus, variables that used to be ignored before - such as parents' educational level, parental attention to students, time spent on homework - were considered in the model that evaluated student performance predictors (KANTOR and LOWE, 2017). In this sense, Coleman's (1966) great contribution was to emphasize the socioeconomic issue of students as something of significant importance. In other words, after the findings of his study, it was practically impossible to analyze educational performance without considering the context in which the school and students were inserted (DOWNEY e CONDRON, 2016; KANTOR e LOWE, 2017).

Although the main finding of Coleman's study (1966) was the affirmation of the high impact that socioeconomic factors had on student performance, his report brought a number of questions related to schools that would be able to make a difference. Among them, there is the quality of the teaching staff, which was pointed out by the researcher as the main intra-school characteristic capable of significantly affecting learning. However, these findings and others that emphasized that the school had a certain importance were practically ignored by academic interpreters (HOXBY, 2016; KANTOR and LOWE, 2017).

Apparently, Coleman, who was one of the greatest contemporary researchers and who carried out the second largest research in the field, was the victim of a misinterpretation. Or rather, he had his study biasedly interpreted by those who pray for pessimism. The main idea attributed to him - "that school funding does not matter for performance" - was never said by Coleman (CHICAGO, 1995). It should be mentioned that the title of his obituary in the Washington Post clearly expressed this feeling: "Coleman, a researcher who was not understood" (CHICAGO, 1995).

A few years after Coleman's study, more precisely in the early 1980s, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, there is, once again, now in the field of sociology, a great reinforcement of pessimistic thinking in the educational field. In this space-time, a set of researches emerges that will be consolidated under the aegis of a theory that is now called critical-reproductive theory. This French-European theoretical proposal has as its central idea the pedagogical pessimism, or naive pessimism of education (FREITAS, 1995; CORTELLA, 1998; SAVIANI, 2020).

Similar to the interpretation that the school has no importance attributed to Coleman (1966), for the critical-reproductivists the school only reproduces the inequalities of the environment to which it belongs (DA SILVA NETO and SAVIANI, 2021). Three critical-reproductivist theorists gained notoriety by defending this idea: Baudelot and R. Establet, with the Theory of the Dualist School; Althusser, with the theory of the school as an ideological apparatus; and Bourdieu and Passeron, with the theory of the education system as a symbolic violence (SAVIANI, 2020).

In general terms, the theory of the dualist school has as its main work the book entitled *L'École Capitaliste*, from 1971, by the Frenchmen C. Baudelot and R. Establet. Their negative dialectical thinking is based on the assumption that there are two schools, one for the bourgeoisie and the other for the proletariat, hence the advent of its dual name. In this sense, the role of the school is to reproduce social inequalities by providing curricular contents that privilege the bourgeois class to the detriment of the proletariat (BAUDELLOT and ESTABLET, 1971, 1975). In Brazil, according to Saviani (2020), the dualistic character of the school, supposedly, can be observed from the moment in which education for the poor is oriented towards the training of the workforce, while the rich receive content that preserves the abstraction and directs them towards a superior culture.

In an analysis of school curricula, in order to try to reaffirm his thesis on the dualistic nature of schools, Gadotti (2016) presents that disciplines focused on language are one of the examples of apparatuses for the reproduction of inequalities, since, for him, curricula tend to teach the formal language, which is bourgeois, instead of teaching the informal language, of the proletariat. As the author quotes, “Language plays an important role in division and discrimination. It is the students from the popular classes who have the greatest problems in reading and writing, right in the first grade. The school only reinforces bourgeois language, the cultural norm, disregarding the linguistic practices of children and the poor.” (GADOTTI, 2016 p. 190).

Also of French origin, Althusser's theory of the school as an ideological apparatus argues that the State constitutes the school as merely an instrument of domination by the dominant forces, that is, the bourgeoisie (ALTHUSSER, 1970, p. 21). In this sense, the theorist claims that

Well, what do you learn at school? You go more or less far in your studies, but in any case, you learn to read, write, count; moreover, some techniques, and much more besides, including elements (which can be rudimentary or on the contrary deepened) of scientific or literary culture directly usable in the different places of production (one instruction for the workers, another for the technicians, a third for the engineers, another for senior management, etc.). Therefore, practical knowledge is learned. (ALTHUSSER, 1970, p. 21)

For Althusser (1970) the school is the space that oppresses and legitimizes the ruling classes through teaching, consequently expanding social inequalities. It is up to teachers to play a central role in this process of oppression, as he points out “most do not even have a glimmer of doubt as to the work that the system (which surpasses and crushes) forces them to do, worse, they dedicate themselves entirely and, in all conscience, to carry out this work” (ALTHUSSER, 1970, p.67-68)

In Brazil, critical-reproductive ideas gained prominence and notoriety from the studies of Bourdieu and Passeron, from 1990 onwards (MICELI, 2021). For the authors, the role of the school is to reproduce social inequalities through cultural reproduction. This occurs because the school is understood by them as one of the “most effective factors of social conservation, as it provides the appearance of legitimacy to social inequalities and sanctions the cultural heritage and the social gift treated as a natural gift” (BOURDIEU e PASSERON 2012, p. 45).

As Menezes (2018, p. 24) states, for Bourdieu, “the role of the school is to legitimize the process of eliminating children from the most disadvantaged classes, providing the character of meritocracy to those not eliminated from the most favored classes, thus guaranteeing the ‘reproduction’ of what is socially established and defined”. Saviani (1999) also draws general lines on Bourdieu's thought and Brazilian schools, stating that

The dominated groups or classes are socially marginalized because they lack material strength (economic capital) and are culturally marginalized because they lack symbolic strength (cultural capital). Education is not an element to overcome marginality, but reinforces it. What is judged to be a failure is, in principle, the success of the school, due to what is judged to be a dysfunction, a pathology, etc. It is the function of the school. Hence, the segregating and marginalizing character of the school. (SAVIANI, 1999, p. 32)

In this perspective, teachers have a prominent role, because they have a high degree of notoriety, as they are considered by Bourdieu and Passeron as the operators of a farce structured in the form of a teaching system, which in the words of the authors, “teachers constitute the most finished products of the reproductive system” (BOURDIEU e PASSERON, 2012, p. 206). Detailing this vision, it is stated that

It is in this sense that a tacit relationship is established between the professor and the institution that he or she represents: the institution only exists as a social agent through the practices of its professionals (APs); at the same time, these professionals withdraw from the institution what they need to ensure for their social position: by granting the teacher the right and power to divert the authority of the institution to his own benefit, the school system ensures the surest means of obtaining from the employee that he put all his resources and all his personal seal at the service of the institution and, therefore, of the institution's social function (BOURDIEU and PASSERON, 2012, p.159).

In a way, what is observed in critical-reproductivist theories is a negative dialectic, without presenting, however, a pedagogical proposal for the problems listed by them. In fact, these pessimistic theorists build a deterministic theory of education, leaving researchers with the task of merely observing the tragedy of teaching and criticizing it. As highlighted,

the anguish becomes greater in teachers due to the fact that the school is an institution that directly meets the requirements of domination, producing and reinforcing differences instead of promoting equality and the promised freedom. In this sense, teachers, initially imbued with a feeling of change and social transformation, are concerned about the unmasking of reality, questioning what remains to be done if the school contributes effectively to the reproduction of this system. Dissatisfaction and restlessness grow in the exercise of understanding the schemes of domination and reproduction; however, **accommodation is often presented as the only possible reality**, thus distancing itself from the possibilities of challenging and transforming established social schemes (ALMEIDA, 2005, p. 140)

In this sense, Snyders (1977, p. 287) wisely describes the consequences of critical-reproductive theories: “either Bourdieu and Passeron or the class struggle”.

Curious about the fact and worthy of mention is that critical-reproductive theories tend, to a certain degree, to be used in conjunction with Marx's thinking. However, their meanings significantly contradict even the most basic notion of the Marxist thought. That is, while the negative critical thinking that constitutes these theories is limited to the world of ideas, Marx always defended that only through practice can individuals free themselves from the process of oppression. In his own words:

Revolution, not criticism, is the true driving force of history, religion, philosophy, and every other theory. This conception shows that the end of history does not end up being resolved in “self-consciousness”, as “spirit of the spirit”, but rather that each stage is given a material result, a sum of productive forces, a relationship with nature and between individuals, created historically and transmitted to each generation by

the one that precedes it, a mass of productive forces, capitals and circumstances, which, on the one hand, are greatly modified by the new generation, but which, on the other hand, dictate its own conditions of existence imprint it with a certain development, a specific character; therefore circumstances make men as much as men make circumstances (ENGELS and MARX, 2001, p. 36)

In short, these pessimistic views of school, still widely defended in Brazil, and the socioeconomic level of the family would have a fatal influence on learning, regardless of the type of education offered by the school itself. The attachment to innatism in all its forms, existing in academia (DIAS and BALOG, 2021), may explain why this thought is still alive in the Brazilian academic space. In general, many researchers adopt the concept that it is enough to criticize the world for everything to be magically resolved (DELEUZE, 1992; CAVALCANTI and ALCADIPAN, 2011). In this sense, it is inferred that for them it is better that the school remains, like this, bad - because, in this way, they will always have something to criticize.

The work of Moraes, Menezes and Dias (2019) reveals, after an in-depth analysis of the Brazilian public education system, that the critical-reproductive perspective does not maintain itself as true when trying to explain the problems of the Brazilian education system. Because most of the problems result from variables under the responsibility of the school, as the authors write in another related text:

These are variables that define students' academic success, but not as suggested by the Bourdieusian approach, because they are not variables that are part of the students' cultural or social heritage, nor are they prior to their entry into school. These are variables specific to the schools. Therefore, its results cannot be attributed to the students' family background which, from the Bourdieusian perspective, could determine their school failure or success. (MENEZES, MORAES and DIAS, 2020, p. 130)

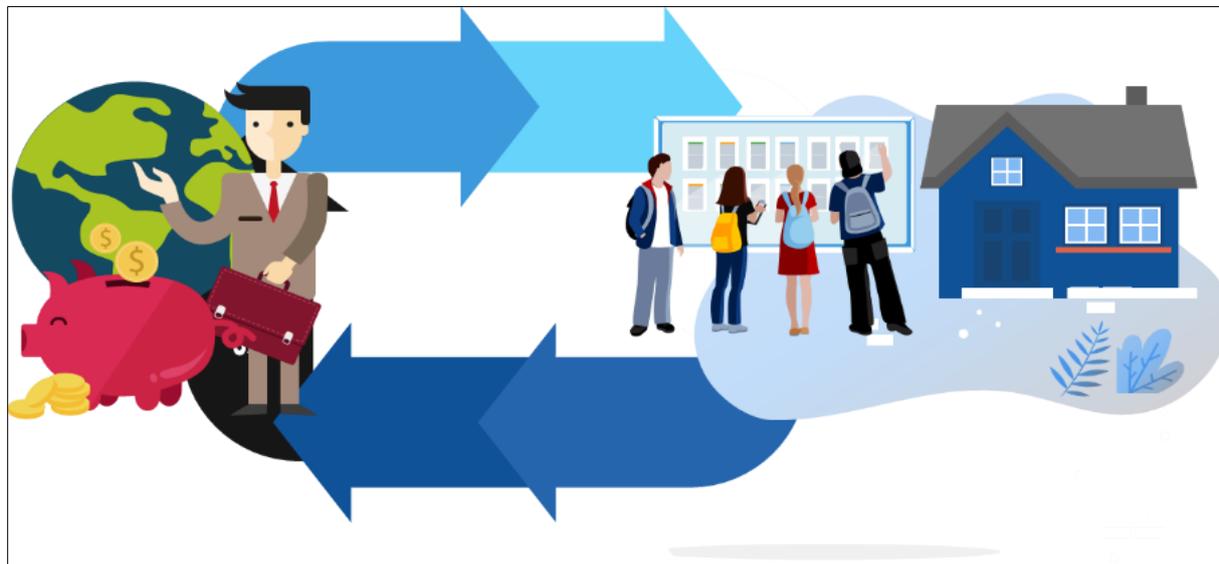
In fact, we can presume that these deterministic ideas are aligned with the interests of the dominant ones, since trying to change may not even result in the desired transformation, but doing nothing will certainly not change the current situation. Along these lines, supporting this statement, it can be mentioned that

Therefore, denying the demands and transformations of contemporary society does not help at all in the educational process of teaching and learning. Globalization, capitalism, technological revolutions and high competitiveness have revolutionized social relations and especially the labor market, directly affecting teachers' work in teaching practice. (DE JESUS, 2021)

In contrast to fatalist critics, another current of thought, combating theoretical-reproductive inaction, was formulated by managers, sociologists, and educators who began to raise a new question: is it possible that the school can make a difference in the lives of students, as an organization capable of overcoming socioeconomic barriers? This concern gave rise to an optimistic perspective, with two important theoretical currents: in economics and administration, the so-called school effect theory; in educational sociology, the referenced critical-social theory of school contents (SAVIANI, 2013). These theories, guided

by practice, start from the premise that what actually happens at school, when well articulated, allows the school to be the guiding agent of a social transformation, thus overcoming socioeconomic limitations (MORAES, DIAS and MARIANO, 2021).

Figure 2 - Illustration of the concept that school and society influence each other



Source: Developed by the authors.

Specifically, the theory of the school effect has as its main creators the studies of Rutter (1979) and Hanushek (1986, 1989), which bring a positive view of school actions and their ability to transform reality. Basically, the school-effect can be well understood as “how much a school organization, through its internal policies and practices, adds to student learning” (BROOKE, CUNHA and FALEIROS, 2011, p. 10).

Contrasting the conceptions attributed to Coleman, theorists of the school effect argue that the main limitation contained in Coleman's methodology (1966) was to consider as input, in his statistical model, variables outside the school (socioeconomic characteristics) and inside the school (intra-school resources) as equals. Thus, the socioeconomic level was seen as just another variable input in the school's research model. By treating students from different socioeconomic levels as equals, Coleman's model (1966) was unable to observe the role of the school in the student performance. To overcome this methodological problem, school effect theorists proposed an approach that considered school effectiveness from the socioeconomic level, and not by it (HANUSHEK, 1986, 1989, 1994, 2005, 2007, 2013, 2016; HANUSHEK, RIVKIN, TAYLOR, 1996; HANUSHEK and WÖßMANN, 2011, 2012). In other words, the school effect methodology was formulated considering that the school's effectiveness is the result of subtracting the student's starting point and arrival point.

Therefore, the school effect also considers that sociocultural, hereditary and economic factors are variables with a great ability to influence the level of the student performance. However, the author does not trace a limit by stating that only these variables determine student learning. In general terms, the school effect signals “what would be the preponderant factors of effective schools, that is, the share of exclusive responsibility of the teaching establishment in the student's performance” (PENA, 2011, p. 58). That is, it is an approach that places the school as a unit of analysis, which from its internal variables, investigates how effective the school is for the student learning.

Based on the proposals made by Rutter (1979) and Hanushek (1986, 1989), several new studies on school effectiveness began to suggest the opposite of Coleman's (1966) study. Ferguson (1991), for example, by analyzing only the most vulnerable socioeconomic level schools, was able to identify a significant impact on improving the performance of students from socioeconomic levels associated with higher levels of financial resources applied at school. Goldhaber and Brewer (1997) and Payne and Biddle (1999), isolating the socioeconomic variables, observed that only the variables related to teacher education impact up to 25% on student performance.

In this way, the school effect allowed, at the end of the 1980s, a reconciliation of the field of organizational studies with the idea that the school was capable of making a significant difference in the lives of students, regardless of the socioeconomic background they came to have. (DANIEL, 2018).

By bringing a contextualized analysis of student performance, the school effect has become, from the 1990s onwards, one of the main tools for comparing educational systems. This became possible because, "the contextualized results can provide, in a more effective way, that the public power supports in a focused way the schools with more difficulties and promotes the dissemination of organizational (administrative) and pedagogical experiences that have proved to be successful" (DANIEL, 2018). Since then, the use of this methodology has allowed in-depth investigations into problems that impact on the quality of teaching and, thus, the promotion of public policies capable of engaging solutions to improve teaching as a whole.

In Brazil, recent studies on the school effect indicate similar findings to international studies. For example, Dias (2017) concludes in his investigation that students with similar socioeconomic profiles reach different levels of learning, depending on the school in which they are. Likewise, it has been observed in national studies that, in addition to economic factors, several findings have been pointing to the significant capacity of factors related to management, infrastructure and quality of the teaching staff as determining factors of teaching and learning (BERNARDO and DE ALMEIDA GARCIA, 2020; GARCIA, RIOS-NETO and MIRANDA-RIBEIRO, 2021; ESPINOZA FREIRE, LÓPEZ CRESPO and RAD CAMAYD, 2021).

Still, on the side of optimistic proposals, in the sociological-educational field, we have the critical-social theory of contents, whose main national representative, with international notoriety, is Professor Paulo Freire. Contrary to the factual determinism of critical-reproductive thinking, the defenders of the social-critical theory of content recognize that society has a great influence on the school, but the school also has the capacity to transform the society. In other words, however many social inequalities may be reproduced within the education system, it is precisely a quality education that would be able to transcend them (FREIRE, 1996; SAVIANI, 2020). Raising the tone against the pessimistic theorists, Freire (1996, p. 19-20) clearly describes that he is opposed to this deterministic, passive and naive view of theorizing the school:

With an air of postmodernity, this insists on convincing us that we can do nothing against the social reality that, from a historical and cultural perspective, becomes or becomes "almost natural". Phrases like "reality is like that, what can we do?" or "unemployment in the world is a fatality at the end of the century" express well the fatalism of this ideology and its indisputable immobilizing will.

In another strong statement, he reiterates and details the facts that lead him to oppose critical-deterministic thinking:

The fight, so current today, against the alarming failure rates that generate the expulsion of a scandalous number of children from our schools, a phenomenon that the naivety or malice of many educators calls school dropout, within the no less naive or malicious school failure concept. Deep down, these concepts are all expressions of the dominant ideology that leads to instances of power, even before certifying the true causes of the so-called “school failure”, to impute the blame to the students. They (the students) are responsible for their learning disabilities. The system, never! It is always like this, the poor are to blame for their precarious state. (FREIRE, 2008, p. 106)

It should also be mentioned that in Freire's active pedagogical proposal, the classroom teacher is not an agent who acts in defense of the interests of the dominant forces, as defended by Bourdieu, but on the contrary, they are actors of dialogue, who through their authority induce the student to know the world, to know themselves, and to know their condition in the world. That is, the teacher is the one who seeks to expand the student's capacity, so that they can perceive themselves as subjects belonging to a certain social reality. Thus, he explained: “one of the beauties of being in the world, as historical beings, is the ability to intervene in the world, to know the world” (FREIRE, 1996, p.28).

It should be noted that even after decades of his proposal, Paulo Freire's idea of an education for transformation is still the exact thing that the Brazilian public education mostly needs today:

A humanizing and liberating education, in Freire's thinking, is a process of reflective enlightenment and love for the world. In this perspective, it is expressed in the act of care, that is, in the ethical relationship with human beings and in the recognition of their humanity as subjects of action in and with the world. It is an education based on life, hope, dialogue, problematization, critical awareness of the subject, humanity and love for the world. For this reason, Freire continues to be present in the fight for human dignity, and his thought feeds hope, especially in his centenary year, of building a welcoming society and universal ethics, that is, the love of life. (DA SILVA and MESQUIDA, 2022, p. 16)

Finally, there is no doubt that we strongly defend in this study the optimistic perspective of educational theories, believing that it is not enough to think and criticize the world, it is also necessary to transform it. And this transformation requires a worldview capable of creating intimacy with the real world of organizations, without privileging theory or practice, in line with the critical-pragmatic proposal defended by Böhm (2002, p. 350) “Only if theory, and practice, meet this challenge, it could be part of social struggles for a different world”.

Final remarks

We believe that the theoretical debate in defense of the school effect that we carry out in this text is extremely necessary, even more so in times of great discrediting of the national public education systems. Therefore, to defend our thesis, we use optimistic theories about the school's ability to improve students' living conditions. The maturity of these approaches lies precisely in the fact that they consider that the socioeconomic environment is one of the factors that most influence school performance, without, however, denying the school's ability to overcome it.

We also understand that the challenge of believing in the role of the school involves an episteme that is necessarily optimistic, but never naive. In fact, we oppose the interpretative exaggerations that lead to fatalism, but we cannot deny that Bourdieu and Coleman's propositions are extremely important. It would be naive to believe that the school alone would be able to reconcile and solve all social problems. There is no denying that it is not possible to have any level of learning when there is hunger, when there is violence, much less when the socioeconomic context forces the student to drop out of school to help support their family.

In a polemical way, we conclude this theoretical debate in defense that schools are important, that is, there is, in fact, the school effect. Without, however, naively, finalizing an idea that the school currently has an always positive effect on capitalist society. However, there is the purpose of denouncing the extrapolation of a finalistic dialectic that leads to an innate thought that the school is incapable of transposing socioeconomic barriers. In other words, at no time do we deny the current inability of education systems to offer emancipatory education. However, we argue that only through the acknowledgement of the school role we will achieve these ideals.

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