

Social representations of students with age-grade distortion about evening high school¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the study conducted in a state public school in southern Santa Catarina, with the objective of understanding the social representations of evening high school students in conditions of age-grade distortion. The procedures used for data collection were semi-structured interviews and the focus group. The obtained data led to the conclusion that the vulnerable economic situation of the students, associated with the school curriculum issues, triggers the age-grade distortion framework. In the students' statements was evidenced the representation of the school as a means of social mobility, focused on the logic of the market.

KEYWORDS: Evening High School. Social representations. Age-grade distortion. Job.

Representaciones sociales de estudiantes con distorsión de edad-grado sobre la escuela secundaria nocturna

RESUMEN

Este artículo informa sobre un estudio realizado en una escuela pública estatal en el sur de Santa Catarina, con el objetivo de comprender las representaciones sociales de la escuela secundaria nocturna para estudiantes en condiciones de distorsión de edad. Los procedimientos utilizados para la recopilación de datos fueron la entrevista semiestructurada y el grupo focal. Los datos obtenidos nos llevaron a inferir que la situación económica vulnerable de los

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estudiantes, asociada con problemas relacionados con el currículo escolar, contribuye a la producción de la imagen de distorsión por grado de edad. En las declaraciones de los estudiantes, destacamos la representación de la escuela como una forma de movilidad social, centrada en la lógica del mercado.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Escuela secundaria nocturna. Representaciones sociales. Distorsión de grado de edad. Trabajo.

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Introduction

The concern with issues involving age-grade distortion is as historic as it is current. In July 2018, a news report from the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP) website disclosed, based on the School Census (the main tool for collecting information on Basic Education in Brazil), that the public educational network has the highest number of students older than expected for the grade to which they belong.

The data provided by the 2018 Census (INEP, 2019) demonstrate that, in addition to the considerable drop in enrollment rates in Basic Education, especially in public high school, the age-grade distortion rates remain worrying, as shown in the table:

Table 1: Age-grade distortion rate, according to gender - 2018

Gender	TEACHING STAGE AND SYSTEM					
	Elementary School			High School		
	Total	Public	Private	Total	Public	Private
Total	17,2%	19,7%	4,9%	28,2%	31,1%	7,4%
Male	20,7%	23,6%	6,1%	32,2%	35,4%	9,2%
Female	13,4%	15,5%	3,7%	24,5%	27,1%	5,7%

Source: INEP (2019).

The common factors of age-grade distortion are: late entry to school, dropouts and/or grade repetition. According to the information provided on the INEP website, the age-grade distortion rate indicator considers the percentage of students who are two or more years older than the recommended level for their corresponding grade. In the data presented in the table above, it is clear that the percentage of students in a situation of age-grade distortion is greater in the high school stage. In a way, this fact can be attributed to situations of school failure, in many cases experienced since elementary school, and aggravated by the early entry of young people into the labor market. This happens for economic reasons or even for the personal desire for independence, which intensifies during adolescence. The difficulty in balancing work and school may not be a determining factor for all students who are part of the age-grade distortion picture, but its contribution cannot be underestimated or disregarded.

It is important, in this case, to also consider that this situation can be triggered by the lack of fulfillment of the school's pedagogical proposal in relation to students, or even by the High School optional system, which only becomes mandatory as from the Constitutional Amendment. This regulation is still being implemented, in spite of the 2016 limit indicated for its effectiveness/universalization, according to the National Education Plan 2014-2024. In its goal number 3, the plan proposes: “to raise, until the

end of the term of this law, the enrollment rate in high school to 85% (eighty-five percent)” (BRASIL, 2015).

These initial data, among others, motivated us to undertake the study, whose focus is to understand the social representations of high school students in a situation of age-grade distortion.

Social representations can be perceived, by Moscovici (2015), as a process of construction of reality, but being products of it at the same time. Therefore, they are the way of thinking and interpreting the world. According to the author, when we study social representations, we study the human beings who has questions and seek to answer them. In other words, representations are created in order to make the unfamiliar familiar, and the uncommon common and real.

According to Guareschi (1996), social representations mitigate the excessive value attributed to scientific knowledge by accepting knowledge from common sense, when explaining the relationship between the individual and the social, due to its concern in highlighting the indissolubility between the internal and the external, consciousness and reality.

Thus, the research focused on the following problem question: what are the social representations of evening high school for students in conditions of age-grade distortion? Therefore, the general objective is consolidated as an attempt to understand these social representations.

Initially, data were collected about the existing state public high schools in Criciúma/SC. After that, the INEP website was accessed to collect the list of schools with their respective performance indicators based on the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) in recent years. The institutions with the lowest index were chosen, considering that they could present a greater number of students with age-grade distortion. Of the twelve schools, two of them had numbers below the average in relation to the others. We decided, then, to visit such schools, through which we obtained the list of high school students, containing information related to the situation of age-grade distortion. After analyzing the results obtained, we decided to carry out the

research only at the school that had the highest number of evening high school students with age-grade distortion.

As a methodological procedure, the semi-structured interview and the focus group were used, focusing on the research objectives. In order to define the participating high school students, which are the objects of the study, it was identified which of them were in a situation of age-grade distortion, based on their dates of birth. This was possible through the documentation provided by the selected school.

Finally, it is important to say that, after an empirical survey of the social representations of evening high school for students with age-grade distortion, one of the issues that stood out was the balance between evening school and work. Thus, in addition to the emphasis on educational policies regarding permanence, grade repetition, dropouts, and age-grade distortion at the level of education in question, as well as the description/analysis of the social representations of students participating in the research, there is also a reserved space for the theme of school-work balance in the context of high school.

The evening high school student

Generally, people in evening schools are marked by experiences of failure during their school careers. In his study, Souza (2016) shows that the vast majority of these students return after a journey of intermittent interruptions and/or abandonment. The unsuccessful experiences resulting from this process end up influencing the way they perceive education.

According to Krawczyk (2011), in the first year of high school, students are proud of themselves for overcoming challenges and reaching this level of education, unlike many of their parents. However, losing enthusiasm for studies is common among young people, especially in the second year, when disenchantment begins, usually caused by difficulties in the teaching process. In the third year, new challenges emerge and

students end up confronting the frustrating fact that going to college is not a guaranteed possibility of getting the job they want.

Many of these young people experience or have experienced situations of failure, which can be related to their socioeconomic status, since they often come from a social context in which the school is not part of their cultural capital, that is, their familiar dynamic (KRAWCZYK, 2011). Because they do not have enough motivation, both from families and from school, they end up giving up on studying. In research related to the theme, Forquin (1995) shows some evidences that social origin influences issues involving the continuity of education. For the author, students from less privileged social conditions are the ones who most experience school failure.

In the same direction, Pereira (2014), in a study carried out in a public school in Rio Grande do Sul, identified that a large part of the students of the dropout data, specifically in evening high school, come from poor families. According to the author, when young people in conditions of age-grade distortion have already gone through an unsuccessful attempt to return to school, they tend to drop out of school more than once. These actions cause “to increase the number of unskilled labor, if not the unemployed” (PEREIRA, 2014, p. 235).

When these people return, often late, they choose evening education, in view of having entered or intend to enter the labor market (SOLER, 2004). According to Souza (2016), when students return, they end up facing a context that does not motivate them to stay at school. One of the factors of this demotivation is demonstrated in the research carried out by Caporalini (1991) in the 1990s, when he proved that the education system commonly reproduces the pedagogical proposal of the day school, which is designed for children, without considering that the majority of evening students are young people and/or adults.

This evidence is in line with the conclusions of Kuenzer (1997) who, also in the 1990s, in a study with working high school students,

understood, through the students' perspective, the inadequacy of teaching practice to the student's interests and worker needs, since the school does not consider its conception of the world, the appropriate knowledge produced at work.

Another highlight point is evening education. In addition to young people having to overcome the fatigue caused by work and study, teachers are also, most of the time, in their third shift and often too tired to propose alternative methodologies to motivate and guarantee the importance of students in the teaching-learning process (KRAWCZYK, 2011).

In short, the lack of contextuality and specificity in the attendance of evening students, given their daily needs, is what differentiates them from daytime students, added to the learning gaps brought by failing and/or dropping out, which put them in the condition of age-grade distortion students. This increases the lack of motivation for classes, as Souza (2016) points out.

Education and work in the context of high school

The developed research revealed the close relationship between school and work. Although the search for independence is part of the development process of young people, in Brazil a large part of them are inserted into the labor market due to financial needs. Many of them, overwhelmed by excessive workload, are unable to balance the concomitant life of students and workers (CORROCHANO, 2014).

In this sense, Kuenzer (1995) has demonstrated, since the 1990s, that the working class perceives the school as a place of access to social knowledge as an instrument for better understanding of the world, as well as an opportunity for better living conditions. However, a question remains: what are the meanings attributed to school knowledge?

Therefore, the approximation between school and labor market, as well as the established partnership between the State and the private sector to serve the developing industry, promoted reflections on general

education versus professional education (KRAWCZYK, 2009). This duality is part of the history of secondary education, which contemplates, or should contemplate, propaedeutic teaching and professional education. The latter has often gained greater status than general education, which, in the case of public schools, is somewhat worrying.

The implementation of issues involving the labor market in the educational sector occurred in an attempt to reorganize it for better quality based on the principle of economic rationality, focusing on efficiency and effectiveness (SANTOS; SILVA, 2013). In this context, the role of the school is to educate multipurpose professionals, which, in many cases, expands the worker's capacity for new technologies and functions, without necessarily having significant changes in this skill and without an understanding of the totality (KUENZER, 2000).

Ferreti and Silva (2017) consider that, since the changes and new requirements related to the worker profile resulting from the capitalism reconfiguration process, the business sector has become interested in educational issues, specifically in high school. Therefore, Motta and Frigotto (2017) emphasize that education, in this logic, is considered an important factor related to economic growth, and investment in human capital becomes essential in order to enhance its productivity.

The discussion on investment in human capital based on the needs of the market reveals a certain conception of education focused on economic development. In this case, knowledge starts to be selected based on its usefulness for this need. Therefore, designed to “enhance competitiveness in local and international markets, or to create conditions for employability, that is, to develop skills and competences that enhance the insertion of the individual in the labor market.” (MOTTA; FRIGOTTO, 2017, p. 358). In this case, human education is linked to the education of the workforce.

Although the official knowledge is the knowledge of the dominant class, influenced by the social relations of production, we are convinced,

like Kuenzer (1995), that the school is vital for the working class, since it is a concrete and possible alternative of access to knowledge, and can become a tool for the democratization of human life. However, it should be noted that this will only be possible to the extent that the knowledge it teaches is questioned and reframed.

A primordial starting point would be for the school to listen to the worker students regarding their needs, desires, and expectations in the collective elaboration and experience of the pedagogical project. In this sense, the school needs to learn to listen to it and reflect on the issue of the relationship between school and work, and the problem that involves the working students and their knowledges.

Kuenzer (2017), however, suspects that the educational itineraries, advocated in the reform of High School (Law 13.415/2017), which establishes the new guidelines and bases for this stage of education under the justification of flexibilization of curricular trajectories, contemplate the issues that involve the working student. According to Ferreti and Silva (2017, p. 398), the discussion that takes place in the formation of the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) tends to promote conceptions and propositions that bring it closer to the perspective of the development of skills and individualism, disregarding expressions such as “protagonism”, “learning how to learn”, “Citizen skills”, “life project”, and “vocation”.

In addition, Kuenzer (2017) emphasizes that the perspective of flexible learning, supported by criticism of academicism, ends up reducing the need for mastery of theory, promoting some superficiality of the educational process, and reducing knowledge to the narratives of daily activities. For the author, flexibilization has the sense of superficiality and simplification, since the workload for general education is reduced to a maximum of 1800 hours with only two mandatory curricular components: Portuguese and Mathematics.

Therefore, regarding epistemological issues, we consider that the reflection on flexible learning is a good idea, since what is being proposed, according to Kuenzer (2020), differs from the assumptions stated in the National High School Curriculum Guidelines of 2012 (DCNEM), which, among others, shows praxis and totality in the historical-materialist conception. In the author's words, praxis is understood as “theoretical and practical activity that transforms nature and society; practice, insofar as theory, as a guide to action, directs human activity; theoretical, insofar as this action is conscious” (KUENZER, 2020, p. 63).

In this reasoning, the articulation between theory and practice is an epistemological assumption in which “intellectual work and practical activity constitute a dialectical duality” (KUENZER, 2020, p. 63). Otherwise, in the flexible curricular organization, what happens is what Moraes (2001, p. 3) calls retreat from theory: replaced by immediate experience, “just knowing how to do it and the theory is considered a waste of time or metaphysical speculation and, when not, restricted to a persuasive and fragmentary oratory, attached to its own discursive structure”. For the author, it is a practical utopia.

As Caporalini (1991) mentions, the school is the only place where students from less privileged social conditions have access to knowledge valued by society. Thus, the didactic content needs to make sense to them so that they can proceed to understand and overcome the social conditions in which they live. After all, “if it is not possible to know reality, it is also not possible to change it” (KUENZER, 2020, p. 64).

However, there is still room for hope and positivity. We believe, like Kuenzer (2020), in the possibility of alternative curricular organizations by schools, in the exercise of their autonomy, conferred by Resolution no. 03/2018 (CNE / CEB), which updates the DCNEM. Therefore, it will be up to the schools to choose alternative forms of curricular organization, aiming, as a counter-hegemonic movement, especially, the integral and emancipatory education of young people.

Evening high school: social representations of students participating in the research

The research developed, as previously said, focused on understand the social representations of high school students with age-grade distortion. As methodological procedures, the semi-structured interview and the focus group technique were used, focusing on the research objectives. Considering that the understanding of the social representations of a certain group is a complex task, the use of the focus group aimed to validate and deepen the data that emerged from the interviews.

At first, it is important to say that the data obtained at the school office, which were acquired from the birth dates of evening high school students, amounted to 74 students falling into the age-grade distortion category, according to the parameters presented in the legislation, namely: students who are two or more years older than the recommended age for each grade (BRASIL, 2018). However, only students with greater age-grade distortion participated in the study, limited to 21 years or more, totaling 11.

It is worth mentioning that the interviews were carried out in two consecutive weeks, and we established a day of the week according to our availability. In the field, we noticed that, of the 11 students listed, two of them had dropped out of school, two were absent for two weeks and one changed to daytime school. What remained were only six of them, a number that we consider small to obtain significant data for achieving the research objectives. In this sense, we expanded the criterion for students aged 20 or over, in order to reach a more representative sample.

Thus, we reached 27 students with the highest age-grade distortion in evening high school. However, we identified that, in addition to the five dropouts, absences and shift changes noted earlier, on the second day of the interviews there were new dropouts, reaching the number of four shift changes, five absences and five dropouts in

total. Thus, of the 27 students selected, only 13, who attended the school at the time, participated in the interviews.

In the handling of data, content analysis is used (BARDIN, 2004). In this sense, we defined the categories based on the objectives of the research and the script of the semi-structured interview, namely: factors of age-grade distortion, reasons for continuing the study, and the students' perception of the school. The category of age-grade distortion factors corresponds to the aspects that influence and/or determine this process. The category reasons for continuing their studies covers the justification that led them to return to school. Finally, the students' view of the school corresponds to what the institution represents for them when it comes to the curriculum and teaching development.

Failure and interruption are factors that determine age-grade distortion. Failure, according to the students, is the result, in the order of frequency, of lack of motivation and/or interest, work/absences, and work/time. The interruption of studies can be influenced by aspects such as work, pregnancy, compulsory military service, obtaining a driver's license, and family influence.

The factor that determines the disapproval most brought by the students is lack of motivation and/or interest. Representative of this factor is what says Student H (2019): "I ended up skipping school to just hang out and do some wrong things. Sometimes I go to class, sometimes I skip it, considering the days I have exams and the days I don't". Another student also reinforces this position: "When you see that you are already failing, you get discouraged, and so do your friends... everything becomes a factor" (STUDENT M, 2019).

According to the students in the focus group, this issue is also related to the pedagogical proposal of the teacher, as we can see in the following statements: "The class is not interesting when the teachers simply write the content on the board and don't spend a lot of time

explaining it”, or when “they don't take into account that we work all day and are tired and overwhelmed”.

In addition, it is important to highlight what the students suggested to be a good class: one that the teachers relate the contents with the daily life, after all, “it is important to know why we are learning that”. Caporalini (1991) and Kuenzer (1997), in their studies, identified these elements by pointing out that the demotivation may be due to the inadequacy of the school proposal to the interests and needs of the working student, by disregarding their conception of the world, and the appropriate and produced knowledge at work as from their experiences.

Another factor brought up by the students that justify the failure is related to the excess of absences and lack of time, both associated with work. About this, we highlight the following statements: “I missed school due to work” (STUDENT F, 2019) and “I failed because I didn't have time to study and do the school assignments” (STUDENT G, 2019). In the focus group, the students added: “We get out of work tired; we don't have time to study”.

It is known that the school, especially with regard to evening teaching, feels the impact of the student's early entry into the labor market due to financial needs and, therefore, the problem that involves the balance of study and work. In the specific case of the researched school, the students come from regions of social vulnerability and are involved in unskilled work in the industrial, mechanical, textile, ceramics sectors, among others. Therefore, there are some difficulties to balance the concomitant life of student and worker.

This situation can be aggravated by the teacher's posture, who often perceives absenteeism quantitatively, without considering the socioeconomic and cultural context that produces it, that is, “the fact of not going to school because the student has to work to have what to eat and wear, making studying a denied reality” (CAPORALINI, 1991, p. 104). These elements confirm that the age-grade distortion encompasses internal (pedagogical) factors, but, above all, it is influenced by external factors, of a structural

nature, which, in turn, affect internal issues, given that the school often reproduces the hegemonic logic of a selective, excluding, utilitarian and credentialist character (ARROYO, 2000).

The interruption of education is also one of the factors that explain the situation of age-grade distortion of students participating in the research. Among the reasons for an interruption, students highlight work again, expressed in the following statement: “I missed a year of school in order to try to get a job” (STUDENT A, 2019).

As previously mentioned, in many cases, due to the socioeconomic context, parents who are in a difficult economic situation and often with a low level of education pressure their children to contribute to the family income, thus favoring school dropout (SOLER, 2004). In these cases, the importance of school is usually reduced, given the need for early unqualified and vulnerable entry of adolescents into the labor market.

It is evident that the conjunctural factors, which involve the vulnerable economic situation of the students, associated with the issues that permeate the school curriculum, contribute to the production of the so-called age-grade distortion. In addition, of course, to the subjective issues of the students themselves, influenced by the context in which they live.

Hence, it is necessary to return to the seemingly debated issue of attributing solely to the student the responsibility for the situation of school success or failure, that is, the tendency to disregard it as an objective production in the context of social contingencies. Therefore, it is necessary to denaturalize issues such as flow correction, age-grade distortion and accelerated learning, as inherent to the educational context that covers the social context in which it is produced (ARROYO, 2000; CHARLOT, 2000).

What stands out is the fact that these young people, marked by negative experiences during their school trajectory, chose to return to school, even after, in some cases, a long interrupted journey. Thus, we seek to

understand the reasons why students decided to continue their studies, debated in order: going to college and getting a better job.

The two reasons highlighted by the students, once again, are related to the job market. In this sense, what they express is significant: “Because I want to have a decent profession in the future” (STUDENT A, 2019) and “Like it or not, you have to continue studying for financial needs, to have a better job” (STUDENT E, 2019). As expected, students reflect the hegemonic idea of the school as a way of social mobility, centered on a market logic (KRAWCZYK, 2009). This is undoubtedly one of the discursive elements that motivate them to return to their studies, even with experiences of failure and the exhaustion that work activity causes.

In a way, when indicating the reasons why they returned to school, the students participating in the research already foresaw their perception of the school. However, in the deepening of this category, we were able to apprehend the following meanings: school as a learning environment/curriculum, as a professional growth and learning environment/curriculum and a place for professional growth.

As can be seen, the perception of the school as a learning environment/curriculum appears with significant frequency in the answers, when the students affirm: “School is made for us to learn” (STUDENT C, 2019) and “It is a place to learn, the time to seek knowledge” (STUDENT L, 2019). However, we ask: what is the meaning they attribute to knowledge and learning?

It is known that the curriculum, being a cultural construction, is configured from what a given context assumes; the realities that condition it are composed of power relations and conflicts of interest (MOREIRA; SILVA, 2002). In the case of research, students recognize the school as a learning/training environment, which we know is not neutral.

The pedagogical proposal of the researched school is supported, according to its Political Pedagogical Project (PPP) (2017, p. 10), in the historical-cultural theory and of the activity, understanding that “both

the specific human characteristics as the language and the conscience result of the collective and historical action of the human being, determined by work”. The document recognizes that knowledge is historical and collective production.

However, again we ask: to what extent has the school appropriated the historical-cultural perspective? This is brought to the fore because the document itself provides for the education of students based on Delors' four pillars of knowledge, namely: learn to know, learn to do, learn to live together, learn to be. It is known that the Delors report has the ideal of citizens to be educated in order to meet the needs of the 21st century. The question remains: Whose needs? In addition, it reaffirms issues of meritocracy, discussed in the course of this study, raising the individual's accountability for their successes/failures and hiding structural issues, involving power relations and exclusion.

Another important point is that, theoretically, the school's PPP resembles, in some aspects, the post-critical curriculum perspective, when it inserts in its mission the commitment to enable the student “access to scientific knowledge and to promote the construction of a responsible, solidary, active, critical, participatory and creative experience, where each subject is aware of their history, committing themselves to the construction of a citizen society” (PPP, 2017, p. 4).

However, in the focus group, students pointed out classes focused on passively receiving content that was out of context of their experiences and working student conditions. This action is antagonistic to the post-critical perspective, which presupposes, among others, the curriculum as the production of meanings and senses, in a living process of integration and interaction between the known and the knowledgeable, contradicting, therefore, pre-determined and pre-ordered practices. (DOLL JR., 1997; SILVA, 1999; CORAZZA, 2008).

Likewise, students perceived the school as a place of professional advancement, either in isolation or combined with the sense of school as a

learning environment/curriculum. With regard to these aspects, the following statement is representative: “School for me is a good place to get a good job; knowledge is everything in life these days” (STUDENT B, 2019).

This is also identified in the focus group, when students say that education is important “because without it it is very difficult to get a job”. The school institution, in this way, is understood as a place of access to social knowledge that will improve living conditions (KUENZER, 1995), which seems obvious. However, it must be questioned: does this social knowledge serve to adjust students to the labor market or to critically intervene in reality?

The fact that some students opt for the Adult Education (EJA) program helps to clarify the question above, since it is an alternative to achieve the desired certification with flexible schedules and content to the demands of the working student. This happens to a student when he mentions that he will not give up his studies: “Even if I do not finish here (regular education), I will take a National Examination for the Certification of Competences (ENCCEJA) or I will go to Adult Education. My goal is to finish high school” (STUDENT H, 2019). Also the case of Student M (2019), who participated in the interviews in the focus group, and had already migrated to EJA.

We know that such a situation is triggered by the overwhelming demand for social ascension in the capitalist scenario, which promotes a certain competitiveness and hierarchy in the labor market. This explains the search for accelerating education (often precarious) and certification, to the detriment of the full experience of pedagogical processes (KRAWCZYK, 2009), that is, the empty certification pointed out by Kuenzer (2005).

Some students in the focus group criticized ENCCEJA to justify their permanence in regular high school, stating that this teaching modality has been characterized as a “factory to generate a diploma, without education” and that “whoever expects to go to college should not attend ENCCEJA”. However, the same students who felt this way, when asked about what they

are learning, what type of education they are receiving, spoke, contradictorily: “We study just to be able to move on to the next grade”, a very popular phrase said by other participants.

Despite this, they stated that they learn better in classes that teachers use methodological alternatives at the expense of the conventional ones, stating that a good class is one in which the teachers relate the contents with their daily lives, which sets up a different dynamic, “because it is the best way to learn”. Furthermore, they emphasize that a good class is one in which teachers show an interest in students' learning, meeting their needs and recognizing their possibilities.

When asked about what they would consider a bad class, they unanimously answered that it is when they only write down the content displayed on the blackboard; which makes it seem that the teacher does not take into account their working conditions and the resulting fatigue. This argument is represented in the statement of a student, who, in the interview, when asked about how he balances his work with his studies, replied: “It doesn't work. Is very difficult. It makes me tired. We are only there physically because it is difficult to study. Speaking for myself, I can't do it.” (STUDENT J, 2019).

From the above, it seems pertinent to rethink the formal structure of the school, including its schedules, contents, and methodologies, which generally do not take into account the length of the student's workday, their needs, their life experiences, their knowledge (KUENZER, 1995). After all, it is important to keep in mind that the curriculum, as a zone of productivity (SILVA, 1999), is a vehicle to create and recreate ourselves and our culture (DOLL Jr., 1997). That is, we produce meanings and seek to obtain, in groups, with other individuals, the effects of it (SILVA, 1999). It is in this process of signification that we appropriate historical culture, but we also build ourselves as subjects, constituting our identities and opinions.

It must be kept in mind that knowledge, trivialized by what we can evidence, is intrinsically linked to power. For true awareness and possible change, it is essential to understand, as Giroux (1988) alludes, the necessary preconditions to fight for this change. Or, as Caporalini (1991, p. 36) reminds us: “it is necessary for students to recognize themselves precisely in the ideas and attitudes that the teachers helped them achieve”. In this sense, knowledge becomes an instrument to fight in defense of someone’s interests.

In view of the explicit relationship between education and the labor market, previously hidden, now desirable (ARROYO, 2000), we defend the urgent need to make working students aware of the hegemonic logic, which determines the educational process. It is known that this association is insufficient and disadvantages the education of young people in a critical transforming sense (KRAWCZYK, 2009, p. 15).

From the data obtained, it can be said that knowledge, recognized as a fundamental formative element (KRAWCZYK, 2009), does not circulate significantly in the space of the researched school, according to the students. The happens because they admit that they have not appropriated sufficient knowledge, since, unanimously, they stated that they do not consider themselves capable of competing for a place in the public or even private university (mainly in the most desired majors/colleges), considering the low chances of approval in the National High School Exam (ENEM).

As Krawczyk (2009) puts it, when these teenagers entering high school learn the curricular contents by critically relating them to the world in which they live, there will be a real process of democratization of education and not the simple progressive massification of it. This is an issue that deserves further study and reflection since there are still challenges to be overcome regarding the permanence of students in school, even though the quantitative data show greater access to high school, which increases the number of low-income young people with a

higher level of education than their parents. Some of the issues to be reframed are: what to teach, how to deal with difficulties to find meaning in school life, and how to think about the world of work from school (KRAWCZYK, 2009), and not the other way around.

Finally, it is important to say that the social representations of students participating in the research on Secondary Education, and therefore on the curriculum, circulate and transit in the school and the society, in which the overwhelming demand for social ascension takes place at the expense of the search for an emancipatory and citizen education. Fortunately, as Moscovici (2005) says, they can be reworked. We truly believe in that!

Final considerations

The theory of social representations was important in this research process, because, since they are hybrid, they are created and shared by people from their experiences. Thus, they come into existence by themselves, constituting themselves in a social reality, with their origin, often forgotten, ignored. Now, it is known that the social representation obtained about individuals who have a school trajectory marked by repetitions and interruptions is placed on the failed student; representations that were created as a society and that people started to use frequently, characterizing and classifying them.

Furthermore, representations are surrounded by ideological phenomena, so they are not neutral. They are related to the individual conception about the human being and society. For this reason, we emphasize, once again, that the term used to characterize students who are older than expected for each stage of education needs to be questioned, especially if it leads to a scenario of exclusion. It is known that representations can be a means of reproducing asymmetric forms of

relationships, in which some realities are placed as inferior or superior, depending on the interest that permeates each representation.

Thus, in order to broaden the discussions on the topic, mainly from the perspective of those who are “on the other side of the line”, we analyze the social representations of students in a situation of age-grade distortion about evening high school. People at this level of education have been marked by experiences of failure and are returning to their studies, as we have identified, after an interrupted and/or abandoned journey of unsuccessful experiences, arising from a social context in which the school is not part of their cultural capital, that is, from their familiar and social experiences.

The data obtained (semi-structured interview and focus group) lead us to believe that students believe that High School is represented as a bridge to the University and/or to get a better job, both associated with the job market. These representations are appropriate, constructed, and reworked among individuals from the environment in which they are inserted; they are even congruent with the principles (not all) established in educational proposals, which seek to overcome and/or avoid issues related to age-grade distortion.

There is a certain concern about the market's supremacy over the school, which has led the official devices, despite their (often) good intentions, to be mischaracterized by offering, undercover, a precarious and lightened education focused only on certification to the detriment of the full experience of the pedagogical processes. Could this be configured as a case of exclusionary inclusion?

Therefore, we believe it is necessary to deepen and critically reflect on the interests surrounding the proposals aimed at high school, which especially affect public school students. This fact is confirmed when we identify those who are in a condition of age-grade distortion in the researched school: students who have repeated a grade, who have dropped out, who are held back, and who are considered “failures”, often coming

from poor families, products of a pre-determined conception of schooling, that is, of neoliberal character.

As we have seen, the school, in the representations of the students participating in the research, is strongly marked as a means to achieve the so desired better job. It is undeniable that duality (general education/professional education) is part of the context of secondary education. However, it is worrying that professional education gains greater status than general education or the fact that certification gains greater importance than the full experience of pedagogical processes – the case of students participating in the research.

The school is essential for the working class, since it is the place of possible access to social knowledge, however, its curriculum needs to be questioned and reframed, as the importance of the school is validated to the extent that the knowledge produced serves as an instrument to fight for the democratization of human life.

However, it is suspected that the new requirements enacted in Law no. 13,415/2017 (BRASIL, 2017) – a High School reform project that advocates flexible learning resulting from the students' dialogue with networks and communities of practices – ends up reducing the need for mastery of theory, promoting a certain superficialization of the educational process and the stimulation of the utilitarian vision of knowledge, intensifying the duality of propaedeutic and professional education. Therefore, it must be asked: what is the possibility of making the curriculum more than an education focused on insertion in the labor market?

We emphasize that the relationship between school and work would not be so negative if the former did not neglect its other social functions related to the promotion of critical knowledge about society and work itself. That is, in the sense of promoting students' understanding, analysis and criticism of the world of work. In this case, it would be necessary to overcome the existing duality and think the world of work from the school, not the school from the world of work, uniting theory and practice, together with

awareness of historically constructed knowledge and power relations imbricated in this process.

We realized that the analysis of the curriculum and the teacher's role is an essential factor in this process, considering that many students with age-grade distortion have great chances of dropping out of school again (which can worsen their situation). This fact was confirmed in the research, when, after collecting data from the school, a significant number of students in conditions of age-grade distortion had dropped out. We know that part of the lack of interest in classes can be associated with pedagogical and methodological proposals that disregard the socio-cultural repertoire of young workers, in the case of evening high school.

The challenges related to high school are clear, especially in relation to the permanence of students in school, what to teach and the difficulties in balancing school and work. The teacher's posture is not decisive, but it can significantly influence the permanence of students, when considering, in addition to their socioeconomic and cultural context, their condition as a working student. To change this situation, the pedagogical system must be made more political, promoting, through knowledge, critical reflections, and clarifying the disputes and power relations intrinsic to the social context.

In relation to high school, in LDB n. 9394/96, it is possible to identify the possibility of thinking beyond the duality between propaedeutic and professional, in the context of the purposes of high school that refer to basic preparation for work, but also for citizenship, including ethical education and the development of intellectual autonomy and critical thinking. However, considering the current emphasis on the education of the multipurpose professional, it is necessary to ask: what kind of citizen are we talking about? What is the real social function of the school today? Possibly, these may be propositions to continue researching on such a relevant topic.

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Received in June 2020.

Approved in February 2021.