

Interview

Marcos Garcia Neira¹

The school nowadays

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Brief curriculum of Professor Marcos Garcia Neira:

Degree in Physical Education and Pedagogy with Master's and Doctorate in Education, Post-Doctorate in Curriculum and Physical Education and Free Teaching in Physical Education Teaching Methodology. Titular Professor at the University of São Paulo, where he serves as Deputy Dean of Graduation (2022-2023). He teaches in undergraduate and graduate courses at the Faculty of Education, directs research at undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels; supervises postdoctoral research and coordinates the Research Group on School Physical Education (www.gpef.fe.usp.br). He investigates the pedagogical practice of Physical Education with support from FAPESP and CNPq, for which he is a Research Productivity Scholar. He has experience with the following subjects: School Physical Education, Curriculum, Teacher Training and Post-Critical Theories.

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01 – Professor, we believe that the pandemic has imposed a series of changes on life in society. Along with the fear of the virus (still little known), with social distancing and isolation, came a wave of discoveries. The very idea of reinventing social relationships in order to guarantee social interaction was also exercised in the school context. Based on this proposal for reinventing everyday life, would it be possible to say that there is a new normal also raised in schools?

Marcos Garcia Neira: Although usual, in my opinion, the expression “new normal” is not the most appropriate to refer to what has been happening at this time of resumption of school activities in person. With the exception of the use of masks (for now), the health protocols widely publicized during the pandemic are practically unnoticed. For those who expected a greater and better use of virtual tools, this is not happening either. Mainly teachers, male and female managers were exhausted after long months in front of the screens. They have exhausted the possibilities within their reach and, now, seek to recover the learning not achieved, resorting mainly to the means and methods known and unfeasible during isolation: books, notebooks, blackboard or whiteboard, dialogued classes, debates, group work etc. . This does not mean, at all, the banning of computer equipment. It is true that many professionals have appropriated not only virtual tools, but also alternative ways of developing pedagogical activities. The use of digital repositories, videos, search engines, etc. is here to stay, as long as the proper infrastructure is available. Contrary to what seems to have happened in other social practices, whose transformations during the period of social isolation last in the first months of 2022, everything indicates that the remote experience in school education has not been missed.

2 – We know that the use of technologies demands that students spend a long time in front of “screens”. It is known that, in excess, this exposure can harm the development of students. How to think about a curricular reorganization in the face of these needs?

Marcos Garcia Neira: The first weeks of face-to-face work have been of great concern to managers, less because of the unlearned content and more because of the loss of skills required during institutional coexistence. In these almost two years of staying at home, students and teachers unlearned to dialogue in search of collective solutions to the problems that arise, becoming more individualistic and self-absorbed. The phenomenon is more common than you might think. There are numerous documented cases of the harmful effects of the absence of interaction with people outside the family group for prolonged periods. The isolation to which we were subjected made one of the most expensive learning experiences at school unfeasible: dealing with those who think differently. Those situations in which divergences arise and in which students and teachers are forced to negotiate with each other and with their peers practically have an enormous pedagogical potential to learn the codes and procedures that characterize social life, especially in those contexts where democracy is valued. Therefore, it is expected that the curricular reorganization to resume face-to-face activities takes into account the need for this type of knowledge, without reducing the importance of those, whose gaps will be easily noticed at the beginning of the school year.

3 – In Brazil, we realize that, with the advent of the pandemic, neoliberal ideals are increasingly present with voracity in the educational context. Could we say that this movement will be able to promote a kind of privatization of education at all levels?

Marcos Garcia Neira: I understand that it is necessary to treat Basic Education and Higher Education separately when the issue of privatization of education is raised. There is no doubt that the privatization of Higher Education in Brazil has been promoted with the support of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and the OECD, and of liberalizing regulation in educational policy that has led to opening up to entrepreneurship and foreign investment. Educational megacorporations have advanced over Higher Education Institutions, profoundly impacting organizational culture. The pandemic also favored changes in academic culture. As classes migrated to remote mode, professors were summarily fired, not before recording hundreds of hours of video classes and preparing activities on virtual platforms. Basic Education was also the target of this voracity. However, if, on the one hand, companies took advantage of the moment to commercialize their technological paraphernalia aimed at education, on the other hand, families soon realized the impossibility of replacing teachers, making homeschooling completely unfeasible. To make matters worse, the impoverishment of the population in this period caused the migration of thousands of children and young people from the private school network to the public network.

4 – Still in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, is it possible to measure the effects that the Corona virus pandemic brought to the teaching and learning process of Basic Education students? What are the main weaknesses of this period? What actions can be taken to minimize the impacts of this process?

Marcos Garcia Neira: From a pedagogical point of view, it would be unfair to establish as parameters the learning objectives established in

the years before the pandemic. Let's take Elementary School as an example. It is obvious to say that children entering the first year practically could not exercise their right to attend Early Childhood Education, while children in the third year do not even remember the classroom, as they only stayed in it for two weeks. Given this, how to think about lag or measurement of learning. The important thing now is to reoccupy schools without neglecting health protocols. With everyone vaccinated, it is up to the teaching staff to realize this reality and plan accordingly. There are students who have experienced social isolation with many difficulties of all kinds, others, a little less, but they cannot do without care and attention. Learning and teaching require calm, tranquility, organization, understanding and commitment from all parties. It is our duty as adults and professionals to take responsibility and do our best to help children and young people to find and rediscover themselves at school. No teacher has lived through this process, students and their families either. So everyone will have to learn how to do it. It will be easier if you walk together. There is no general rule, each community will go its own way.

5 – Is it possible to think of a different school in the post-pandemic period? From what aspects?

Marcos Garcia Neira: Thinking about a different school, more than possible, is desirable. Not just thinking, but doing. The pandemic made explicit what we all knew: the absurd and shameful educational inequality that plagues us. For better or for worse, the private network sought alternative means of its own to ensure minimal interaction with the students. It turns out that we are talking about the minority of the population. The vast majority remained excluded from a training experience systematized by the duration of social isolation. Despite the

efforts of many teachers, most municipal and state networks took a long time to provide the necessary support, regardless of format. The result could only be absenteeism and evasion. Faced with this situation, society cannot repeat pre-pandemic educational mistakes. It is our obligation to provide schools and their professionals with the resources for pedagogical work that corresponds to contemporary demands. We cannot accept the lack of vacancies, the low salaries, the terrible working conditions, the ineffectiveness of the activities, the inattention of the public power and, mainly, the abandonment of children and their families to their own fate. In many cases, this is exactly what happened during the pandemic. The joy shown by students and education professionals on returning to face-to-face activities needs to be reciprocated with affection and competence. The welcome that we all deserve and desire goes beyond smiles, structure and teaching qualifications. Post-pandemic education must be placed among the State's priorities. This means converging efforts to subsidize schools with well-qualified and well-paid staff, good infrastructure and curricula in tune with the construction of a less unequal society.

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