

Public schools of the twenty-first century: inflections in the educational project¹

A escola pública do século XXI: inflexões no projeto educativo

La escuela pública del siglo XXI: inflexiones en el proyecto educacional

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Abstract: This article analyzes data from two qualitative educational studies conducted within the São Paulo State school system, involving daily school observations, student focus groups, and documentary analysis. The findings indicate that recent educational reforms—particularly the upper secondary education reform—has produced significant changes in both the form and content of schooling. These changes deepen the subsumption of education to the demands and imperatives of financialized imperialist capital in the early decades of the twenty-first century, promoting a pragmatic model of instruction at the expense of a humanistic, scientific, and critical education. Transformations such as these constrain the capacity of schooling for the working classes to support processes that empower new generations to engage critically with social inequality and marginalization. The results further suggest that a turning point is underway in the education of young people enrolled in Brazilian public schools.

Keywords: Secondary Education Reform; Digitization and Platformization of Education; Shift in Youth Education.

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Resumo: Neste artigo são analisados dados de duas pesquisas qualitativas em educação, realizadas na rede estadual paulista de ensino, envolvendo observações do cotidiano escolar, grupos focais com estudantes e estudo documental. As análises indicam que um conjunto de reformas educacionais recentes, especialmente a do ensino médio, operaram mudanças na forma e no conteúdo formativo da escola, aprofundando sua subsunção às necessidades e determinações do capital imperialista financeirizado das primeiras décadas do século XXI, promovendo uma instrução pragmática em detrimento de uma formação humanística, científica e crítica. Tais mudanças limitam o potencial da escolarização das classes populares em promover processos que capacitem as novas gerações para atuarem em uma perspectiva crítica às desigualdades e marginalizações sociais, e sugerem que está ocorrendo um processo de inflexão na formação das juventudes que estudam nas escolas públicas brasileiras.

Palavras-chave: Reforma do Ensino Médio; Digitalização e Plataformização da Educação; Inflexão na Formação das Juventudes.

Resumen: En este artículo se analizan datos de dos investigaciones cualitativas en educación, realizadas en la red estadual paulista de enseñanza, a partir de observaciones del cotidiano escolar, grupos focales con estudiantes y estudio documental. Los análisis indican que un conjunto de reformas educativas recientes, con destaque para la reforma de la enseñanza secundaria, realizan cambios en el contenido formativo de la escuela, profundizando su subordinación a las necesidades y determinaciones del capital imperialista financiero de las primeras décadas del siglo XXI y promoviendo una instrucción pragmática en detrimento de una formación humanista, científica y crítica. Tales cambios limitan el potencial de la escolarización de las clases populares para promover procesos que capaciten a las nuevas generaciones para actuar en una perspectiva crítica frente a las desigualdades y marginalizaciones sociales y sugieren que está ocurriendo un proceso de inflexión en la formación de las juventudes que estudian en las escuelas públicas brasileñas.

Palabras clave: Reforma de la enseñanza secundaria; Digitalización y Plataformización de la Educación; Inflexión en la Formación de las Juventudes.

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Introduction

Educational reforms or counter-reforms implemented in Brazil during the final decade of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first century are producing what this article terms an inflection in the formative project of public school youth.

The Enlightenment and republican ideal of education centered on scientific and humanistic formation failed to provide knowledge capable of fostering social mobility and equality. This occurred because expanding school access relied on a segmented system with distinct formative proposals, determined by social class divisions and capitalist societal characteristics (Bourdieu, 1998; Gramsci, 2014).

While schools are historically urged to articulate knowledge with societal production and reproduction needs—including the labor market—education has never been so subsumed to market laws, dynamics, and determinations. This happens in an era heavily marked by the exclusion or precarization of vast segments of the workforce (Biesta, 2013; Laval, 2004).

Since the 1970s, capital has transformed the world of work, particularly through flexible accumulation. New factors like financialization, expanding globalization, advancing information and communication technologies (ICTs), labor uberization, and “Industry 4.0” shifts drive profound social changes. The 2008 crisis further impacted the international division of labor, eliminating a large amount of living labor while intensifying precarization and informality within less-qualified sectors (Antunes, 2020). Tonelo (2020) argues these changes intensify, rather than overcome the neoliberal capitalist accumulation pattern, raising structural unemployment and impacting lifestyles, the environment, culture, and education.

Following the perspective presented by Martuccelli (2017), we understand these changes as inflections that, while operating important alterations, do not signify ruptures with capitalist logic and the central elements of modern society. In the author’s words:

[...] the notions of mutation, not to mention rupture or revolution, do not seem pertinent to delimit the contemporary imaginary of change, as they are excessively linked to the representation of a new beginning and a more or less radical socio-historical creation. To describe the current situation and our imaginary of change, the notion of inflection is more appropriate. Although it indicates a change of direction in a trajectory, it has the advantage of referring to a form of continuity with the past (Martuccelli, 2017, p. 15, free translation).

While analyzing recent reformulations in public education, we understand that they mark important changes in the declared assumptions that guided education under an Enlightenment/republican perspective. However, they do not constitute a transformation in the school’s function of contributing to the production and reproduction of society.

Thus, by examining the changes operated by educational reforms as an inflection in the formative processes of working-class youth, we point out that these alterations are in a trajectory that, circumscribed within a tradition, presents new elements.

Our analyses focus primarily on the upper secondary education reform, it articulates with the definition of a centralized and standardizing curricular policy,

namely the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC)⁶ (Brasil, [2018a], [2018b]); (Brasil, 2017, [2018a], [2018b]). It highlights the emphasis and proliferation of large-scale evaluation mechanisms centered on quantitative metrics and rankings; and the precarization of teacher training for basic education, mostly through distance learning courses mass-produced by large private conglomerates, among others. Furthermore, amid these processes, school militarization resulting from “civic-military school” programs is equally emblematic of a regressive character when claiming that student performance improvement relies on control and discipline inspired by military barracks. These processes articulate around a restricted conception of human formation and public schooling, suggesting an ongoing inflection in youth education.

Based on two studies conducted within the São Paulo State school system, we provide data and analyses signaling changes in school form and content. These manifest in teaching labor, school management, curricular and school knowledge organization, and the type of schooling destined for youth.

The first section of the article addresses changes resulting from a set of programs and legislative alterations, showing how these articulated actions signal inflections in the meanings historically attributed to the public school.

The second section analyzes changes in school content, indicating that the proposal to offer knowledge deemed relevant to market needs through the curricular components of training pathways suggests a real subordination of the school to the requirements of productive restructuring and shifting labor dynamics. We perceive here an inflection in historically consolidated school knowledge.

The third part analyzes the inflection of the formative process based on student perceptions of two central mechanisms in the upper secondary curricular transformation: training pathways and educational digitalization. The accounts indicate the emergence of a fragmented and rushed pedagogical model, accompanied by intensified autocratic control over teachers and students. Far from promoting inclusion, democratic relations, and citizenship—as argued by international organizations and educational technology companies—they alter the public school and the student craft (*ofício de aluno*)⁷ itself. The research indicates an educational project in Brazil aimed at producing behaviors and

⁶ The BNCC for early childhood, primary and lower secondary education was approved in 2017, and for upper secondary in 2018, concurrent with the approval of the reform for this stage of basic education.

⁷ By “student craft” (*ofício de aluno*), we refer to a “determined type of work, recognized or tolerated by society” (Perrenoud, 2015, p. 15, our translation) and by the institutions to which this actor belongs. It is expressed through the roles and activities expected of this actor, as well as the survival and circumvention strategies they practice.

values that shape the character and collective identity of working-class youth, conforming a new youth *ethos* aligned to neoliberal societal demands.

The case of the São Paulo State system is particularly interesting for this approach. The state of São Paulo pioneered the implementation of the reform, with Rossieli Soares—former secretary of basic education at the Ministry of Education (MEC) when MP 746/2016 (Brasil, 2016) was imposed—heading the São Paulo State Department of Education (Seduc-SP) in 2019. In 2023, under Governor Tarcísio de Freitas and Education Secretary Renato Feder, the administration not only promoted adjustments to continue the upper secondary education reform but also intensified educational digitalization and platformization, mirroring the secretary’s previous actions in the state of Paraná.

Aspects of the inflection in the formative project: between reforms and regressive programs

This section provides evidence that current changes in public schools impact the educational projects realized within them. It shows how these shifts signal inflections in the meaning of schooling and school systems, counteracting historically stated purposes.

To this end, we highlight an articulated set of regressive programs, actions, and laws—which could also be termed a counter-reform—when viewed from a historical perspective, emphasizing the period initiated in 2016 following the deposition of President Dilma Rousseff.

The rupture of democratic institutional framework, verified through a turbulent process widely criticized regarding its legality and legitimacy, triggered a series of measures targeting social rights. This text focuses primarily on actions affecting upper secondary education, the final stage of basic education. These actions span from the reform imposed via Provisional Measure (MP) 746/2016, converted into Law No. 13,415/2017 (Brasil, 2017), to the development and imposition of the BNCC (Brasil, [2018a]), which is tied to performance targets in large-scale evaluations. This ongoing process gradually imposes new elements onto the formative project of Brazilian youth.

Law 13,415/2017 introduced proposals including a curriculum divided between a common core, designated as General Basic Education (FGB) by the National Curricular Guidelines for Upper Secondary Education (Brasil, 2018), and training pathways (*itinerários formativos*) for student selection. What proponents framed as curricular flexibility ultimately denied the right to a complete, common basic education, as previously mandated by the National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB, Law 9,394/1996). Originally, the LDB defined upper secondary education fundamentally as part of “basic education.” Removing mandatory subjects like philosophy and sociology,

reducing common core hours, and restricting mandatory requirements only for Portuguese and mathematics subjects exposed the denial of the right to knowledge and to an education that should be holistic—scientific, ethical, and aesthetic.

Professional education via concurrent enrollment led to abandoning the prioritization of the integrated upper secondary model, which achieves quality professional training precisely through the integration of basic scientific education and specific technical training. Incentivizing the expansion of professional education merely as a “pathway” result in a precarious form of technical-professional training, exacerbated by the privatization of public provision through partnerships with the private sector.

The impossibility to ensure this standard of basic education reinforces educational inequalities. This is worsened by a final provision in Law No. 13,415/2017 stating that school networks decide which pathways to offer, effectively preventing students from exercising their alleged freedom of choice.

This law established that upper secondary hours for the common core must align with the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) document produced by the Ministry of Education (MEC). The mandate for a single national curricular document was originally established by Law No. 13,005/2014, which instituted the National Education Plan 2014–2024 (Brasil, 2014).

Proposing a single national curriculum, criticized since the development of the National Curricular Parameters (Moreira, 1995) and revived during the formulation of the BNCC (Macedo, 2018), raises questions about the prescriptive nature of such policy documents. This framework disregards the social and educational inequalities characterizing Brazil, as well as its territorial, cultural, and ethnic-racial diversity. Furthermore, the BNCC introduces a regulatory dimension tied to large-scale evaluation descriptors and restrictive performance metrics, reducing the concept of quality to numerical parameters.

As highlighted, the reform aligns with private interests over public ones, fostering the marketization of basic education and the private supply of portions of public upper secondary schooling. Ultimately, it reflects a fallacious discourse regarding the need to adapt to corporate sector requirements.

This reductionist perspective illustrates what interests are served by the current direction of Brazilian basic education. Subjugating public education to economicism expresses a profound disregard for the quality of public schools and the holistic development of youth in Brazil.

School and knowledge in the context of educational (counter-)reforms

To analyze the ongoing inflection of the school's function in youth education, we conducted a documentary study as part of an action-research project involving seven public schools in the state system of São Paulo. The study focused on the knowledge organized within the curricular matrices of the New Upper Secondary Education (NEM – *Novo Ensino Médio*) (Brasil, 2017; Brasil, 2024)⁸.

Sometimes aligned with national educational policy, and at other times anticipating it, Seduc-SP implemented a set of educational policies guided by the assumptions of New Public Management and neoliberal rationality (Jacomini; Stoco, 2022). Consequently, since the 1990s, the São Paulo State system has been guided by a pragmatic conception of education, articulated with market demands and the propositions of the capital's Private Apparatuses of Hegemony (APH) (Casimiro, 2018).

The ongoing changes regarding the organization of school knowledge and the contents systematized and developed within school units in the teaching and learning process gained explicit contours more subordinated to the market. This occurred through the managerialism prevailing in schools and the definition of the knowledge valued and determined within the context of the upper secondary education reform.

The first generation of São Paulo students under the NEM graduated in 2023 amid widespread criticism of the reform and a feeling of deception by a discourse that promised to make this basic education stage more engaging, attractive, and connected to youth expectations. Moreover, there was a clear perception of lacking access to relevant knowledge aligned with the statutory purposes of upper secondary education: basic preparation for work, citizenship, and the continuation of studies (REPU; Gepud, 2024).

The implementation of the reform in the São Paulo system began with a curriculum comprising 11 training pathways linked to the BNCC knowledge areas, organized into 66 curricular units and 276 curricular components, plus 25 components linked to the technical-professional training pathway, alongside common core subjects distributed across 1,800 hours. This caused an immense fragmentation of knowledge, diminishing the content of common core disciplines and introducing diverse contents through training pathways. These contents were not always covered in teacher education degrees, fostering a certain amateurism in the pedagogical handling of school knowledge (Jacomini et al., 2024).

⁸ The action-research project involved a broader set of data collection and analysis procedures. However, for this article, the procedure used was documentary analysis, specifically targeting the proposed content for the training pathway components introduced by the upper secondary education reform.

The reform of the reform—as the 2024 amendments to Law 13,415/2017 (Brasil, 2017) via Law 14,945 of July 31, 2024 (Brasil, 2024) became known—partially addressed the criticisms and demands of academic and labor union sectors. These groups had mobilized to revoke the reform and defend public schooling with socially referenced quality, with the reinstatement of 2,400 hours for common core disciplines being the primary positive outcome.

An analysis of the regular upper secondary daytime curricular matrices for 2024, 2025, and 2026 in the São Paulo system reveals, on one hand, a reduction in training pathways and curricular components. On the other hand, it shows the introduction of pathway components heavily tied to market language and demands at the expense of a scientific, humanistic, and critical education capable of questioning hegemonic rationality.

This is explicit in components such as entrepreneurship, technology and robotics, and Life Project within the training pathway linked to mathematics and natural sciences. The components leadership, public speaking, and Life Project within the pathway linked to languages and Applied Social and Human Sciences demonstrate the same trend.

The 2026 upper secondary curricular matrix (São Paulo, 2025) established training pathway components directly linked to FGB disciplines⁹. Examples include advanced biology and advanced chemistry for the mathematics and natural sciences pathway, replacing biotechnology and applied chemistry. For the languages, applied human, and social sciences pathway, advanced sociology, advanced geography, and advanced philosophy were introduced, replacing modern philosophy and geopolitics, while leadership and public speaking were merged.

Although this matrix may be considered more adequate than previous ones, its implementation must be monitored to determine if it positively affects student development. This will depend on the availability of licensed teachers capable of teaching these advanced components in articulation with their respective disciplines. At least in part, this could restore the content lost due to the reduction of classes for these subjects within the FGB portion of the matrix.

The formative proposals embodied in the training pathway components further corroborate this inflection in the school's function.

⁹The FGB for 2026 comprised the following disciplines: Portuguese language, composition and reading, English language, art, physical education, mathematics, financial education, biology, physics, chemistry, philosophy, geography, history, and sociology. The components financial mathematics and composition and reading, which were part of the pathways in previous years, became part of General Basic Education (São Paulo, 2025).

Two issues suggested by the 2024, 2025, and 2026 matrices stand out: first, the reduction of class hours, especially in human sciences; second, the type of formative vocation proposed in the pathway components.

Contradicting expectations that human sciences class hours would be restored following the reinstatement of 2,400 hours for common core disciplines, the São Paulo State system further decreased hours for these subjects. This is evidenced by a study conducted by several associations and published in the technical note “Reduction of human sciences in the curriculum of the São Paulo State school system” (REPU et al., 2025, free translation).

The study shows a reduction in common core class hours across all knowledge areas in the São Paulo State system, with human sciences suffering the sharpest decline. Regarding human sciences, the depreciation of this knowledge is clear, reflecting an option for an education that devalues “powerful knowledge,” in the terms of Young (Galian; Louzano, 2014). Such knowledge is capable of providing working-class and subaltern youth with the scientific and humanistic tools necessary to act in society as “rulers and ruled,” in Gramscian terms (Gramsci, 2014).

Analyzing the content proposed in Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Life Project reveals knowledge aimed at conditioning students to fit into a society increasingly devoid of social rights and adherent to individualistic, meritocratic, and pragmatic values. In this case, the peremptory function of the school has become social conformation under the banner of entrepreneurship.

The focus rests on so-called socio-emotional skills and a superficial treatment of themes related to the world of work. Thus, the curriculum, particularly regarding training pathways, fosters an entrepreneurship of subjectivity to commodify all aspects of life.

This scenario is accompanied by the deepening precarization of teaching labor relations, as Leadership and Life Project replaced Sociology and Philosophy content. Faculty members tied to these academic backgrounds were assigned to teach these new entrepreneurial components, as established by Resolution 84 of October 31, 2024 (São Paulo, 2024). This configures a downgrading of the general educational conditions offered by the São Paulo system at the upper secondary educational level.

These changes maintain a certain continuity with a type of schooling destined for subaltern working-class youth. Furthermore, they deepen a project of subordinating and colonizing the totality of human life to the designs of capital.

This inflection in educational conditions produced in recent decades influences the student experience, as presented in the next section.

Youth student experience and the inflection of the public school's social function

As previously noted, the inflection in youth education operates through various mechanisms. This section analyzes two such mechanisms within the São Paulo State system, drawing from student experiences. The first is curricular diversification through training pathways, framed by policymakers as a solution to the alleged disconnect between upper secondary education and youth interests—a disconnect frequently blamed for high dropout rates and low academic performance. The second mechanism is the adoption of digitalized teaching, officially termed “technology-mediated education” and announced as an educational revolution.

To examine these phenomena, research was conducted across three public high schools within the São Paulo State system¹⁰. In the Sorocaba region, the study focused on a regular full-time high school, utilizing questionnaires, interviews, and student focus groups centered primarily on the pathways. In Campinas, an ethnographic approach was employed, supplemented by questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups addressing both the pathways and digitalized teaching. This ethnography encompassed two distinct institutional settings: a regular daytime and evening upper secondary education offering both academic advanced pathways and technical vocational pathways, and a Full-Time Education Program (PEI – *Programa de Ensino Integral*) school operating on a seven-hour daily schedule.

Field observations, interviews, questionnaires, and focus groups took place between 2022 and 2025. The ethnography spanned 2023 and 2024, tracking a diverse group of six students (three girls and three boys, including self-declared White, Black, and Pardo/Mixed-race individuals) in each of the two Campinas schools. In the regular Campinas school, researchers followed a cohort enrolled in the technical pathway from 2022 to 2024. At the PEI school, the 2023 cohort was observed during their first year of upper secondary as they navigated the pathway selection process; by 2024, these PEI students were enrolled across various pathways. Additional students from both institutions were also interviewed.

Regarding digitalized teaching specifically, the ethnography was supplemented in 2025 with questionnaires administered to 89 students from various classrooms and pathways

¹⁰ The schools were selected based on their availability to host researchers, as well as their shared characteristics—peripheral schools serving low-income, working-class families—and their structural diversity (regular versus full-time schedules and varying training pathways).

across both Campinas schools. Based on an initial analysis of these responses, six students from each school were selected to participate in dedicated focus groups. The gathered data were analyzed using several analytical categories, the most salient of which are discussed below in relation to the two central research problems.

Corrochano (2024) showed that positive expectations circulated among students during the initial implementation of the upper secondary education reform. While some expressed skepticism, hope for meaningful educational transformation persisted. The recent expansion of upper secondary education access had generated a set of aspirations among these youth that, although not entirely erased (Corrochano, 2024; Sposito; Souza Santos; Silva, 2017), showed signs of regression when confronting concrete material difficulties. While the new model cannot be labeled the sole driver of this regression, its contribution cannot be ignored.

The implementation of training pathways suggests, according to Krawczyk, Jacomini, and Silva (2023), that early educational diversification forces premature decisions upon students who are simultaneously navigating the initial stages of youth and the final phase of basic education. Throughout their academic trajectories, these choices may change; when they do, they are frequently interpreted as personal “errors,” shifting the accountability for the educational path entirely onto the student.

Most interviewed youth stated they felt unprepared to make these choices, experiencing the process as a premature rationalization of their trajectories, carried out with minimal information or institutional support. During a focus group at the PEI school, a student captured this shared sentiment:

I would have preferred to choose, but at least in the third year, you know? But it's a choice we are [making] in the first year. We're just arriving, getting to know everything right now, and it's hard for us to choose what we want for two years when we don't even know how things work...

Throughout 2023, schools received scarce information regarding the new pathways to be implemented the following year, severely limiting their capacity to guide students. Consequently, the discourse surrounding student choice proved fallacious. The frustration of students whose choices were ultimately disregarded intensified friction with school management, especially given the schools' lack of human resources and material conditions to execute the program. In the visited schools, youth were frequently found studying in pathways they had not chosen, particularly those tied to the common core.

While professional technical education is valued by most surveyed youth, and those in the technical-vocational pathway reported positive connections between the

content and their daily lives, their “choice” came at a cost. Students expressed this decision as a trade-off for losing the FGB content required to access higher education via the National Secondary School Exam (ENEM – *Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio*) and university entrance exams. A student in the Human Resources technical pathway summarized this: “*if you choose to do something, you’re going to have to pay a price for it.*” Students in academic pathways also shared this perception of being underprepared for higher education. Particularly from 2024 onward, subjects such as financial education, entrepreneurship, arts and digital media, Life Project, public speaking, and leadership replaced several traditional disciplines.

Although early youth is a phase where institutional support for experimentation and exploration is vital, student testimonies indicated the exact opposite. They perceive a progressive loss of meaning in schooling, increasing their vulnerability to dropout. The school’s deepening inability to foster a meaningful relationship with knowledge (Charlot, 2003) became even more evident under these reforms. Instead of expanding access to knowledge that aids in understanding the world, the curriculum placed an overly pragmatic emphasis on the newly implemented components, restricting holistic student development.

Participants highlighted the central role of teachers but recognized that classroom quality was compromised when educators were forced to teach content outside their fields of expertise, particularly in subjects like Life Project, Financial Education, and Entrepreneurship. This structural strain generated both student empathy and criticism. The lack of material, instructional, and formative support for teachers revealed that the implementation of the NEM occurred in isolation from the actual working conditions of these professionals.

The partnerships under Novotec (a São Paulo State program offering technical and vocational courses) introduced another layer of curricular fragmentation. At the time of the study, partner entities—whether public, private, or third-sector—assumed control of the technical pathway classes, while common core classes remained with school teachers. Teachers from partner entities did not attend school pedagogical meetings and answered exclusively to their respective employers. This divided the curriculum into “technical days” and “general education days.” Students failed to connect vocational knowledge with FGB disciplines and, internalizing a school discourse that privileged technical days, prioritized attending those over general education days when absences were unavoidable.

Furthermore, disparities between partner entities were stark. In the studied Campinas school, the partner was the Indaiatuba Foundation for Education and Culture (FIEC), a municipal public institution funded by local revenues and inter-municipal agreements,

employing teachers under regular labor contracts (CLT) with hourly wages reaching R\$ 49.00. Conversely, the partner at the São Roque school was Proz Educação, a private educational corporate entity established in 2020, which hired teachers as independent contractors (PJ) at significantly lower rates (Krawczyk; Quadros; Silva, 2024).

This push toward the indiscriminate expansion of technical courses, largely funded by public resources through private partnerships or distance-learning modalities, marks another facet of the inflection in youth education. This vocational expansion weakened the Integrated Upper Secondary Education model, previously considered the benchmark for quality technical education. Even when delivered within the same building, the new vocational pathway decouples basic scientific education from technical training, resulting in severe curricular fragmentation.

The research also highlighted the persistence—and even the exacerbation—of historical inequalities in evening education. With the expansion of the PEI, many students migrated to the evening shift due to class and school closures, or faced split-shift schedules to meet the mandatory 3,000-hour requirement. Concurrently, evening enrollment increased in later grades, reflecting how labor becomes an increasingly inescapable reality as youth age (Zan; Krawczyk, 2026).

Most evening students work, fulfill family obligations, or attend external vocational courses, showing a preference for the “S System” (industrial/commercial training services) due to its perceived link to immediate employment. Their accounts expose systemic state neglect and a form of veiled marginalization.

This educational framework aligns with a bourgeois offensive for technocratic, pragmatic training rooted in an updated version of Human Capital Theory, operating within a highly exclusionary, deregulated market (Quadros; Krawczyk, 2024). The idealized “entrepreneurial,” individualistic, and alienated subject is required to self-manage both personal finances and emotions—behaviors central to hegemonic neoliberal ideology.

We highlight that this formative process is not entirely uncontested. The study showed that schools remain spaces where youth develop a critical worldview, engaging with themes of racism, sexism, inequality, and social class. However, antagonistic frameworks increasingly contest this critical function of schooling. Backed by the power of capital, this dispute is driving an inflection in youth education toward neoliberal conformity and the social reproduction of contemporary capitalism.

In this context, the introduction of digitalized teaching intensifies autocratic mechanisms of control over teachers and students. Pedagogical labor is increasingly standardized around predetermined targets. The mandatory use of platforms and pre-

packaged digital lessons¹¹ became the central lever of Seduc-SP control from 2023 onward, affecting both school management and classroom instruction.

While interviewed students do not oppose technology itself, they criticize its hyper-intensification and the surveillance it entails. In their view, digital platforms and pre-packaged lessons constituted the most disruptive change in daily school life, inducing alienation from pedagogical work. Both students and teachers recognize that the learning activities no longer belong to them, as they bypass teacher planning entirely. Teachers are reduced to mere executors, a shift described by a PEI school student who noted that while teachers previously “[...] would come into the room and explain their subjects, today they arrive and [say]: ‘log on for an hour on Khan [math platform]’ or ‘an hour on Leia [reading platform]’.”

This dynamic undermines student engagement, erodes classroom relationships, and disrupts the learning process, fostering a tense yet detached school climate. The student craft itself undergoes an inflection; youth report intense pressure to log platform hours, fewer opportunities for peer dialogue, and a sharp reduction in notebook writing and the reading of printed books and materials.

Despite pre-existing infrastructural deficiencies, PEI students pointed to a reduction in practical science labs and diverse instructional resources, such as teacher-student collaborative projects or film discussions. This reality stands in stark contrast to the collective experiences native to adolescent development and the promised “personalization” of learning. In response to this pervasive digital surveillance, students developed survival and circumvention strategies, including platform manipulation as a form of transgression. The youth have widely reported using scripts and artificial intelligence to bypass platform assignments and artificially meet institutional targets.

Driven by rigid Seduc-SP enforcement of platform metrics, technology ceased to function as an educational support, rendering teachers appendages of digital platforms. To the historical precarization of teaching and the devaluation of pedagogical expertise brought by the training pathways, schools now add a profound loss of didactic autonomy.

The student experience reveals that this “new” pedagogical model is far from promoting inclusion, democracy, or citizenship—contrary to the rhetoric of international organizations and EdTech firms. Instead, it produces an inflection in the

¹¹Pre-packaged digital lessons consist of standardized digital slide presentations produced by Seduc-SP for all subjects and classes. These slides were mandated to replace other instructional materials, such as textbooks. Because state external evaluations (*Prova Paulista*) are strictly aligned with these slides, teachers and administrators are compelled to restrict their teaching to this standardized material.

opposite direction, metamorphosing the roles of teachers and students, fracturing the relationship with knowledge, and exacerbating educational inequalities. Within this framework, troubling indicators emerge, including heightened anxiety, demotivation, and school dropout among working-class youth.

Concluding remarks

The studies revealed that historically accumulated scientific knowledge, which could contribute to a humanistic and scientific education, is increasingly replaced by market-derived knowledge, especially within the curricular components of the training pathways. This knowledge directs schools to shape youth behavior to adapt and conform to an increasingly deregulated labor market and a society with progressively weakened social protection networks. Within this framework, the use of platforms and pre-packaged digital lessons serves to control pedagogical labor, curbing potential forms of transgression or critique against the ideology imposed by this educational project.

The flexibility propagated by the reform's ideologues manifests as educational deregulation and precarization. Concurrently, it forces the implementation of a standardized general education framework (Krawczyk; Ferretti, 2017).

The ongoing reform expands tracking into distinct trajectories, limiting the possibility of higher education continuity for the majority. Consequently, it thwarts a critical insertion into the labor market—mediated instead by the concept of entrepreneurship—while undermining the intellectual autonomy of the youth.

Furthermore, the current changes impair teaching autonomy through several factors that reinforce the regressive nature of school formative processes. This is clearly illustrated by the emphasis on large-scale evaluation metrics and their associated indices, the growing platformization of pedagogical processes through mandated and standardized pre-packaged digital lesson plans, and the insertion of elective curricular components lacking any scientific foundation. While it is necessary to revisit the previous school model to confront its limits and problems, the current reform not only fails in this confrontation but also deepens existing issues and creates new ones.

The provision of knowledge deemed relevant to market needs through training pathway components, coupled with the introduction of educational digitalization and platformization, occurred without social reflection or participation regarding its impacts on youth education. This characterized a counter-reform that removes historical mediations between the school and market demands, subjecting education directly to them.

This unfolds within a political and social context of restricted rights, particularly concerning the world of work, where a scientific, humanistic, and critical education is essential to confront the setbacks imposed by neoliberalism. For these reasons, we affirm that an inflection process is occurring within the formative project realized by public schools in Brazil. The upper secondary education reform, alongside educational digitalization and platformization, serves as an emblematic example of this process.

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