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Historical-Critical Pedagogy and Teacher Education in Vocational Education: students' perspectives in times of neoliberalismo

Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica e Formação Docente na Educação Profissional: olhares discentes em tempos de neoliberalismo

Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica y Formación Docente en la Educación Profesional: miradas estudiantiles en tiempos de neoliberalismo

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Abstract

This article analyzes the perceptions of students enrolled in Technical and Technological Education regarding the teaching practices developed by their instructors, seeking to identify the extent to which these practices align with the principles of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and the ideal of integral human formation. Grounded in historical-dialectical materialism, the study adopts a qualitative approach, using focus groups and questionnaires conducted in 2015 and replicated in 2025. The results reveal the persistence of structural contradictions in vocational teaching, marked by the dissociation between technical and pedagogical knowledge. Students' statements expose both alienated practices and mediating, humanizing experiences, highlighting the centrality of pedagogical training as a political and social act. It is concluded that Historical-Critical Pedagogy remains an essential counter-hegemonic framework for guiding teacher education and strengthening public schools as spaces of resistance and emancipation.

Keywords: Historical-Critical Pedagogy, Teacher Education, Vocational Education, Historical-Dialectical Materialism, Neoliberalism.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as percepções dos estudantes da Educação Profissional e Tecnológica acerca das práticas didático-pedagógicas desenvolvidas pelos docentes, buscando identificar em que medida essas práticas dialogam com os pressupostos da Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica (PHC) e com o ideal de formação humana integral. Fundamenta-se no materialismo histórico-dialético e adota abordagem qualitativa, com grupos focais e questionários aplicados em 2015 e replicados em 2025. Os resultados evidenciam a persistência de contradições estruturais na docência da EPT, marcadas pela dissociação entre saber técnico e saber pedagógico. As falas discentes revelam tanto práticas alienadas quanto experiências mediadoras e humanizadoras, apontando a centralidade da formação pedagógica como ato político e social. Conclui-se que a PHC permanece um referencial contra-hegemônico essencial para orientar a formação docente e fortalecer a escola pública como espaço de resistência e emancipação.

Palavras-chave: Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica, Formação docente, Educação Profissional, Materialismo histórico-dialético, Neoliberalismo.

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las percepciones de los estudiantes de la Educación Profesional y Tecnológica acerca de las prácticas didáctico-pedagógicas desarrolladas por sus docentes, con el objetivo de identificar en qué medida dichas prácticas se articulan con los principios de la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica (PHC) y con el ideal de formación humana integral. Fundamentado en el materialismo histórico-dialético, el estudio adopta un enfoque cualitativo, utilizando grupos focales y cuestionarios aplicados en 2015 y replicados en 2025. Los resultados evidencian la persistencia de contradicciones estructurales en la docencia de la educación profesional, caracterizadas por la disociación entre el saber técnico y el saber pedagógico. Las declaraciones de los estudiantes revelan tanto prácticas alienadas como experiencias mediadoras y humanizadoras, destacando la centralidad de la formación pedagógica como un acto político y social. Se concluye que la Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica sigue siendo un marco contrahegemónico esencial para orientar la formación docente y fortalecer la escuela pública como espacio de resistencia y emancipación.

Palabras clave: Pedagogía Histórico-Crítica, Formación Docente, Educación Profesional, Materialismo Histórico-Dialético, Neoliberalismo.

1. Introduction

In 2025, Brazil marked forty years since the process of redemocratization that followed the end of the civil-military dictatorship (1964–1985). This period was characterized by intense political and educational disputes, in which, on the one hand, the struggles of educators and students for the democratization of public schooling were confronted, and, on the other, the expansion of neoliberal policies, which fragmented teaching work and commodified education (Frigotto, 2010; Duarte, 2011).

Within this context of advances and setbacks, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), formulated by Saviani (2005; 2013), became consolidated as a theoretical and political framework of resistance. By proposing an education committed to human emancipation and to overcoming the inequalities produced by the capitalist mode of production, Saviani (2005; 2013) conceives education as a mediating social practice, oriented toward the critical appropriation of knowledge historically produced by humanity. From this perspective, the school is constituted as a space for the socialization of knowledge and the formation of consciousness, rather than as a mere instrument for adapting individuals to market demands (Saviani, 2013).

This conception assumes particular relevance in Professional and Technological Education (PTE), a modality historically marked by tensions between training for work and integral human formation. As Frigotto (2017) observes, the dual structure of Brazilian education, by separating technical education from propaedeutic education, reinforces the logic of capital and reproduces social inequalities, especially among working youth. Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), by contrast, proposes to break with this duality by understanding work as an educational principle and social practice as both the point of departure and the point of arrival of the formative process. This perspective stands in opposition to technicist pedagogies and to reforms guided by the logic of competencies and individual performance (Duarte, 2004).

From the 1990s onward, with the consolidation of neoliberal ideology in Brazil, education began to be reconfigured according to principles of efficiency, competitiveness, and individual accountability. This process entailed a reduction in the role of the State, curricular fragmentation, and the valorization of instrumental competencies, to the detriment of critical formation (Harvey, 2008; Gentili, 1998). In the field of Professional and Technological Education (PTE), neoliberal reforms intensified the historical duality between technical training and humanistic education, subordinating teaching work to productivist and entrepreneurial demands. As Dardot and Laval (2016) warn, neoliberal rationality transforms education into a commodity and redefines the teacher as a manager of results and the student as an entrepreneur of the self.

Understanding didactic-pedagogical practices in PTE, therefore, implies problematizing how teachers, whether formally trained for teaching or not, translate the principles of Historical-Critical Pedagogy into their educational action. Students' perceptions thus constitute a privileged analytical pathway to identify whether pedagogical work effectively contributes to the critical and omnilateral formation of learners or, conversely, reinforces the utilitarian and productivist logic that has characterized technical education in recent decades.

Accordingly, this article aims to analyze the perceptions of students in Professional Education regarding the didactic-pedagogical practices developed by teachers, seeking to identify the extent to which these practices engage with the assumptions of Historical-Critical Pedagogy and with the ideal of integral human formation. The study is grounded in the understanding that the school, as a mediation between theory and social practice, constitutes a locus of resistance to neoliberal and neoconservative tendencies that depoliticize the educational act and weaken teaching work.

By reaffirming the contemporaneity of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, this study seeks to contribute to the debate on the contemporary challenges of Professional and Technological Education (PTE) and to the consolidation of a public, democratic, and socially referenced education. Within this horizon, educational practice aims to enable students to comprehend historically produced knowledge, overcoming the fragmentation of knowledge and bringing it closer to the concrete conditions of social life. As Saviani (2005, p. 7) states, “[...] human beings do not become human naturally;

they are not born knowing how to be human [...]. To know how to think and act; to know how to will, act, or evaluate, it is necessary to learn, which implies educational work.”

2. Historical-Critical Pedagogy as a Counter-Hegemonic Foundation in Education

Brazil's recent history has been marked by cycles of democratic rupture and popular resistance. In order to ensure the maintenance of the economic and social order, dominant classes, at different moments, have violated the very laws they pledged to uphold, sometimes through overtly authoritarian actions, such as the 1964 coup, and at other times through juridical mechanisms that legitimize political ruptures, such as the 2016 impeachment (Gomes; Paula; Rodrigues, 2023).

It is within this scenario of democratic advances and setbacks that, from the 1980s onward, educational movements committed to the country's reconstruction on critical and emancipatory foundations emerged. Among them, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) stands out as a pedagogical and political theory of resistance to liberal and technicist pedagogies. Grounded in historical-dialectical materialism, HCP understands education as a social practice embedded in the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, reaffirming knowledge as an instrument of liberation rather than of adaptation to the demands of capital.

This perspective acquires particular relevance in the field of Professional and Technological Education (PTE), whose trajectory reflects, as noted by Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1634), “a historical subordination to capitalist policies.” Such a condition makes it urgent to reclaim counter-hegemonic approaches that reaffirm the right to systematized knowledge as an emancipatory principle. In this direction, the conception of education as a mediating social practice brings Saviani's thinking (2005; 2013), within the field of pedagogy, closer to that of Vygotsky (1999), within psychology, as both share the same dialectical-materialist matrix, even though they operate at distinct theoretical levels.

For Vygotsky (1999), human development occurs through social relations mediated by language and culture, with learning functioning as the driving force of higher psychological functions. Saviani (2005) transposes this principle to the pedagogical and political sphere by understanding the school as a space for the critical appropriation of knowledge and the formation of consciousness. In both perspectives, the teacher acts as an active mediator between theory and practice, between knowledge and social reality, through symbolic mediation in Vygotsky (1995; 1999), and through the intentional socialization of scientific and philosophical knowledge in Saviani (2005).

These conceptions converge with the Marxist ontology of the social being, according to which human beings are constituted through social relations mediated by labor, transforming both nature and themselves. Saviani (2005) translates this ontology into the educational field by asserting that human beings are not born human but become human through educational work, through the appropriation of historically produced culture. Thus, knowledge functions as an active mediation between the subject and the world, and teaching is the process through which students critically internalize elaborated knowledge, overcoming alienation and grasping reality in its totality.

Building upon this shared foundation, Historical-Critical Pedagogy integrates contributions from historical-cultural psychology in order to formulate a dialectical pedagogy, in which educational work is simultaneously an act of knowledge and a political act. This articulation reinforces the centrality of public schooling in integral human formation and in the consolidation of a democratic project of society, especially within the context of the forty years of Brazilian redemocratization.

Professional and Technological Education (PTE) emblematically exposes the contradictions between the emancipatory project of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and the functionalist project of neoliberal reforms. Structured around the logic of educational duality, PTE has historically assigned the working class a technical and utilitarian form of training, while reserving access to intellectual culture for elites (Frigotto; Ciavatta; Ramos, 2005). As

emphasized by Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1635), “technical education in Brazil has its genesis on discriminatory and elitist ideological bases,” oriented toward the qualification of cheap labor, without commitment to integral formation, a critique that converges with Saviani and Frigotto (2010b) in denouncing technicist reductionism.

Historical-Critical Pedagogy stands in direct opposition to neoliberal rationality, which transforms education into a commodity and redefines the teacher as a manager of results and the student as an entrepreneur of the self (Dardot; Laval, 2016). Whereas neoliberalism reduces knowledge to human capital and subjects the school to the logic of productivity, HCP reaffirms the social and emancipatory character of education, understanding teaching as a critical mediation between elaborated knowledge and social practice. In this sense, teacher education in PTE constitutes a field of political dispute and resistance, since each pedagogical act may either reaffirm or challenge the hegemonic project of society.

By revisiting the concept of labor as an educational principle, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) broadens the understanding of professional education beyond the logic of employability. According to Saviani (2013, p. 112), labor, by transforming nature and producing culture, constitutes the foundation of human formation. Education, therefore, should enable workers to critically understand productive processes and to recognize themselves as historical subjects. This perspective stands in opposition to productivist and managerial policies that, as noted by Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1639), have subjected Professional and Technological Education (PTE) to market forces, emptying the formative role of the State and restricting the social function of the school.

As emphasized by Frigotto (2010b) and Ciavatta (2014), this neoliberal offensive consolidated an educational model oriented toward efficiency and flexibilization, to the detriment of critical and integral formation. Costa and Coutinho's (2018) critique of Law No. 13,415/2017, which reformed upper secondary education, highlights the persistence of this dispute: curricular fragmentation and the replacement of teachers by technical staff reaffirm the duality denounced by Historical-Critical Pedagogy. This reform materializes a project that is not new but has intensified in recent decades—the State's omission in providing resources for public education and the hollowing out of contents historically produced by humanity (Gomes; Paula; Rodrigues, 2023).

By contrast, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) proposes a polytechnic and omnilateral form of education, in which labor, science, technology, and culture constitute inseparable dimensions of the educational process (Costa; Coutinho, 2018). This principle expresses the emancipatory horizon of historical-critical pedagogy: to educate subjects capable of understanding, intervening in, and transforming reality. As synthesized by Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1646), “defending a polytechnic, public, free, and unified professional education” is an ethical and political duty of educators committed to democracy.

Four decades after redemocratization, the contemporaneity of Historical-Critical Pedagogy is thus reaffirmed as a theoretical and practical project aimed at overcoming educational duality and reconstructing public schooling as a space of human emancipation, a horizon of resistance and hope in the face of neoliberal hegemony.

2.1. Teacher Education in Professional and Technological Education and the Challenge of Pedagogical Mediation

The dialogue between Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and teacher education is grounded in the assumption that professionals without pedagogical training tend to face greater difficulties in understanding and valuing students' social and historical contexts as the starting point of the educational process. This condition stems largely from the fact that, in their formative trajectories, many of these professionals, engineers, chemists, architects, nurses, lawyers, among others, did not have systematic access to theoretical and epistemological discussions that underpin teaching work. Under such circumstances, the exercise of teaching tends to take shape without the critical appropriation of pedagogical knowledge, which may result in practices predominantly centered on the transmission of technical content, to the detriment of pedagogical mediation committed to integral human formation.

Gauthier et al. (2006) argue that what characterizes a teacher is not only mastery of the subject matter, but also of its structure, its historical construction, and the ways in which it can be taught, elements that distinguish the teacher from the technical specialist who merely masters content. Teaching, therefore, constitutes a profession endowed with its own body of knowledge, articulated with didactics, epistemology, and ethics, rather than a mere extension of competencies from another professional field. In this direction, Tardif (2004) observes that teaching work is not limited to the reproduction of knowledge, but involves a reflective and creative relationship with knowledge, which is (re)constructed in the movement of practice.

From the perspective of historical-dialectical materialism, this issue acquires a deeper dimension: teaching practice is understood as an expression of the contradictions between manual labor and intellectual labor. According to Saviani (2005, p. 14), “the school is an institution whose role consists in the socialization of systematized knowledge,” which requires teachers to mediate between scientific knowledge and social practice. Thus, mastering content is not sufficient; it is necessary to understand its historical role in human formation and to develop the capacity to transform it into an instrument of emancipation.

Freire (1996) reinforces that teaching requires critical reflection on practice, so as to prevent theory from becoming empty discourse and practice from turning into mere activism. In the same vein, Sacristán and Gómez (2000) argue that teaching, when deprived of theoretical grounding and ethical commitment, is reduced to the simple reproduction of habits and responses to external demands. The teacher, before being an efficient technician, must be a historical subject capable of grounding their practice in values and ideas that guide their choices and project their social consequences.

From this perspective, Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) offers a horizon for overcoming such fragmentation, as it understands teaching work as a mediating social practice, linked to the production and socialization of scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge. Teacher education, therefore, must go beyond formal licensure, requiring critical consciousness, theoretical mastery, and political intentionality. It is this articulation between theory and practice, between the singularity of pedagogical action and the universality of social reality, that makes it possible to transform professional education into a space of emancipation rather than of adaptation to the demands of capital.

3. Methodological Pathways from a Historical-Dialectical Perspective

This study adopts a qualitative approach, understood as an interpretative process in which the researcher actively participates in the construction of meanings, articulating empirical evidence with the adopted theoretical framework (Lüdke; André, 1986). The research is guided by a historical-critical framework in dialogue with historical-dialectical materialism, understood not as a technical method of investigation, but as a theoretical-interpretative matrix for reading empirical data. This framework conceives social reality as a dynamic, contradictory, and historically determined process, allowing educational phenomena to be understood in their totality, based on the mediations between pedagogical practices and the historical, political, and institutional conditions that produce them (Frigotto, 2010; Saviani, 2005; 2013).

In the field of education, this perspective makes it possible to move beyond immediate and descriptive readings of school reality, interpreting teaching practices as socially situated expressions. According to Frigotto (2010, p. 84), the dialectical perspective is linked to a conception of totality and historicity, in which “posture precedes method,” understanding knowledge as a mediation capable of revealing the real movement of society. In this sense, the investigation departed from concrete social practice, specifically, in this study, students' perceptions of teaching work in Professional and Technological Education (PTE), seeking to make explicit the contradictions and historical determinations that shape this practice.

The historical-critical reading of the data is also grounded in the Marxian understanding that, under capitalism, social relations tend to assume fetishized forms, obscuring the concrete links between subjects and socially produced

labor. As Marx (1983, p. 363) points out, this involves “a social relation that assumes the fantastic form of a relation between things [...]. Private labors only manifest themselves as divisions of social labor through the relations that exchange establishes between the products of labor and, indirectly, between the producers.” This excerpt contributes to understanding how certain pedagogical practices, when reduced to a technical dimension, tend to obscure the social and historical relations that permeate teaching work in Professional and Technological Education (PTE).

Within the scope of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), knowledge is understood as a social and historical construction, rather than as a mere record of observable facts. Accordingly, the research went beyond the simple description of data, seeking to interpret the educational phenomenon in its contradictions through the articulation between the singular (the students' concrete statements and experiences), the particular (the institutional and formative conditions of PTE), and the universal (the structural determinations that impact education in contemporary capitalism).

The interpretation of empirical data also engages with the dialectical perspective proposed by Kosík (1976), for whom grasping a phenomenon requires moving beyond its immediate appearance, simultaneously understanding both how the object manifests itself and how it conceals itself within that manifestation. In practical-utilitarian engagement with reality, individuals in a given situation construct representations that apprehend the phenomenal aspect of the real while concealing its deeper determinations. This understanding guided the content analysis of students' narratives, allowing the expressed perceptions to be apprehended not as isolated opinions, but as phenomenal forms through which the social, historical, and institutional contradictions that permeate teaching work in Professional and Technological Education are simultaneously revealed and concealed.

The study was conducted in 2015 and replicated in 2025 at an institution within the Federal Network of Professional and Technological Education, involving students enrolled in technical programs integrated with upper secondary education. Research participants were selected intentionally, based on criteria such as class leaders and members of the student council, as well as their availability for voluntary participation.

The articulation between the data produced in 2015 and those obtained through the replication carried out in 2025 was conducted through a dialectical reading and, therefore, was not restricted to a chronological comparison. The analysis sought to apprehend continuities, tensions, and reconfigurations of the historical contradictions that permeate teaching in Professional and Technological Education (PTE), understanding the empirical sets as distinct expressions of a single social process. Within this movement, pedagogical practices were analyzed in light of the ways in which, in differentiated historical contexts, the dissociation between technical training and integral human formation is reproduced and contested.

Two meetings were held with 24 students, organized into two focus groups of 12 participants each, enrolled in the investigated technical programs. The sessions, conducted in a conversation circle format, fostered an environment of dialogue and trust, enabling the expression of students' perceptions regarding teaching work and the pedagogical practices experienced. Following the focus groups, a diagnostic questionnaire was administered to a broader population of students. In 2015, the instrument was completed by 128 students from four classes in the 2nd and 3rd years of the investigated technical programs; in 2025, the same questionnaire was reapplied, yielding responses from 94 students across three equivalent classes. Prior to administration, students were informed about the objectives of the research and invited to participate voluntarily and with informed consent. The questionnaire had a comprehensive and evaluative character, allowing students to express their perceptions regarding:

- (a) teachers' pedagogical practices;
- (b) support services and infrastructure;
- (c) course coordination; and
- (d) academic and formative aspects.

A self-assessment section was also included, in which students reflected on their own formative trajectories. In the treatment of the data, the analysis prioritized questions related to teaching practice and the teacher–student relationship, as these represent the core of pedagogical mediation and make it possible to apprehend the dialectical movement between teaching and learning. To delineate the teaching profile, a documentary research was conducted on the institutional websites of the departments to which the teachers were assigned, examining their initial training, academic qualifications, and institutional affiliation; all teachers were tenured faculty members with full-time, exclusive dedication.

Data analysis followed the principles of historical-dialectical materialism, seeking to understand the educational phenomenon across three interrelated levels—singular, particular, and universal. This approach made it possible to interpret students' perceptions as concrete expressions of the structural contradictions of Professional and Technological Education (PTE), revealing the mediations between teacher education, institutional conditions, and the historical determinations of educational work.

The statements from the focus groups were organized into three analytical blocks: (a) non-licensed teachers or those without pedagogical training; (b) licensed teachers; and (c) perceptions common to both groups, when no explicit distinction in training was made. The analysis of students' narratives, obtained through focus groups and questionnaires, made it possible to identify different perceptions regarding teaching work in Professional and Technological Education. The systematization of the data in Table 1 allows for a synthetic visualization of the main student expressions and their interpretations in light of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), highlighting how the contradictions between technical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are manifested in educational practice and reflect the historical and ideological determinations of PTE.

Table 1 – Analytical Axes and Interpretive Synthesis of Students' Perceptions

Analytical Axis	Main Students' Perceptions	Historical-Critical Interpretation
Non-licensed teachers	Lecture-based classes centered on handouts; lack of didactics; limited interaction; "learning depends on self-study."	Expresses the predominance of technical rationality and the absence of pedagogical mediation; reveals the alienation of teaching work and the reproduction of instrumental logic.
Licensed teachers	Mediating practices; clarity in explanations; use of interactive methods; openness to dialogue.	Indicates the presence of pedagogical training that enhances humanizing mediation and the construction of critical consciousness.
Tensions common to both groups	Disarticulation between theory and practice; learning difficulties; situations of disrespect and prejudice.	Reveals structural contradictions of Professional and Technological Education (PTE) and the coexistence of emancipatory and reproductive practices under the influence of the neoliberal context.

Source: research data (2015; 2025 replication).

A dialectical reading of the categories presented in Table 1 reveals that students' perceptions concretely translate the contradictory movement of teaching practice in Professional and Technological Education (PTE), manifested in the coexistence of two antagonistic rationalities: on the one hand, technical rationality, which reduces teaching to the mere transmission of content and adaptation to productivist demands; on the other, emancipatory rationality, which understands teaching as a mediation between scientific knowledge and social practice, guided by the principle of integral human formation.

The criticisms directed at non-licensed teachers reveal the predominance of the former logic, marked by the absence of pedagogical mediations, an emphasis on execution, and the subordination of educational practice to market demands. Conversely, positive experiences with licensed teachers indicate the presence of more dialogical and intentional practices; however, it must be acknowledged that holding a teaching degree, in itself, does not guarantee the overcoming of technicism nor ensure the realization of critical teaching. Initial training may provide the theoretical foundations of mediation, but it is conscious praxis, rooted in the teacher's ethical and political commitment, that transforms knowledge into an instrument of emancipation.

Therefore, students' statements do not constitute mere opinions about teaching performance; rather, they concretely express the struggle between competing projects within the educational field: education as technical and functional training, aligned with neoliberal logic, and education as a process of emancipation and the construction of historical consciousness. This dialectical tension constitutes the interpretive core of this research, reaffirming that emancipatory teaching is not an automatic product of formal training, but the result of critical consciousness and transformative intentionality that guide educational work.

The cross-analysis of students' narratives and documentary data on teachers' education and qualifications made it possible to understand the objective conditions that shape pedagogical practice in Professional and Technological Education (PTE). The analytical focus centered on the relationships between teacher education, pedagogical knowledge, and the mediation of social practice, central categories of Historical-Critical Pedagogy and historical-cultural psychology.

The interpretation maintained the nexus between the empirical and the theoretical, as recommended by Saviani (2005), taking social practice as both the starting point and the point of arrival of knowledge. Students' perceptions were understood not as isolated opinions, but as expressions of an institutional and political context permeated by the historical and structural contradictions of Brazilian education.

The research fully complied with ethical principles governing investigations in the human sciences, ensuring the anonymity of participants and the non-identification of the institution, as such information was deemed not to alter the nature of the results. It is important to emphasize that this methodological choice reaffirms the coherence between the historical-critical framework and investigative praxis, conceiving research not merely as a data collection technique, but as a political act of reading and transforming reality. Thus, investigating professional education from a historical-critical perspective means, as stated by Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1646), "defending a public, polytechnic, and emancipatory education," capable of breaking with instrumental logic and reaffirming the social role of knowledge in the formation of workers and in the consolidation of educational democracy in Brazil.

4. Students' Perspectives and Historical Contradictions of Teaching in Professional and Technological Education

The focus groups conducted with students enrolled in technical programs integrated into Professional and Technological Education (PTE), initially in 2015 and replicated in 2024, revealed convergent and persistent perceptions regarding teaching practice. The interval of nearly a decade did not produce substantive changes: the contradictions between technical mastery and pedagogical mediation remain, evidencing the reproduction of an educational logic that privileges instruction over integral formation. This finding reaffirms the contemporaneity of the critiques formulated by Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and highlights teacher education as a strategic dimension of the democratization of education.

The analysis of students' perceptions was conducted according to the dialectical movement between the singular, the particular, and the universal. At the singular level, the statements express immediate experiences with teaching. Criticisms predominate regarding the absence of didactics, methodological limitations, and lack of dialogue, especially among non-licensed teachers, summarized in statements such as "the teacher does not teach, only tells us to read the handout" or "practical classes are insufficient." In contrast, students describe licensed teachers as "interactive," "clear," and "available," recognizing practices of listening and systematic explanation. Far from being isolated opinions, these manifestations express internal tensions between technical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge.

At the particular level, such tensions acquire meaning when related to objective conditions of training and work. The coexistence of teachers with and without teaching degrees is a hallmark of the historical structure of PTE itself, often oriented toward technical qualification rather than pedagogical formation. The lack of continuous training programs, curricular fragmentation, and, in some contexts, the precarization of employment relationships reinforce

technicist and weakly reflective practices. As noted by Costa and Coutinho (2018), PTE remains “subordinated to market forces,” which displaces the political meaning of public schooling and empties teaching work of its formative dimension.

At the universal level, students' perceptions reflect structural contradictions between capital and labor that permeate schooling. The split between technical mastery and pedagogical mediation derives from the social division of labor and from the educational duality that has historically separated intellectual and manual formation (Frigotto; Ciavatta; Ramos, 2005). This fragmentation, denounced by Saviani (2005) and Frigotto (2010b), is reproduced within Professional and Technological Education (PTE) when technical education is reduced to training, becoming an instrument of adaptation and social control.

Within this analytical process, students' statements were organized into three axes: (1) non-licensed teachers, associated with criticisms regarding the absence of didactics, teaching strategies, and pedagogical interaction; (2) licensed teachers, frequently recognized for mediating practices, clarity of exposition, and openness to dialogue; and (3) perceptions transversal to both groups, which reveal broader tensions in everyday school life (disarticulation between theory and practice; the need for support for students with learning difficulties; episodes of disrespect and prejudice). These elements reinforce the understanding that teaching is not limited to content mastery, but involves values, attitudes, and ethical-political commitments to human formation.

Overall, the discourses from 2015 and 2025 converge on a persistent contradiction in PTE: solid technical competence coexisting with pedagogical fragility. The criticisms directed at non-licensed teachers underscore the centrality of didactic-pedagogical training in sustaining practices consistent with a historical-critical conception of teaching. In light of Tardif (2004), teaching work requires the articulation of knowledge derived from training, curriculum, and experience; its fragmentation results in pedagogical practice devoid of critical reflection.

These perceptions point to a structural rather than an individual problem. For Saviani (2005), education, as a mediating social practice, is realized when teachers master content and pedagogical mediations, transforming elaborated knowledge into accessible and socially meaningful knowledge. The absence of such mediation reproduces the separation between theory and practice, a legacy of the educational duality that has marked technical education in Brazil, frequently reducing teachers to content executors and students to functional learners (Costa; Coutinho, 2018).

On the other hand, more dialogical and mediating experiences approximate Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) and Freirean pedagogy, in which the teacher is conceived as a historical subject and a conscious mediator between scientific knowledge and social practice. As Freire (1996, p. 33) reminds us, “to teach requires understanding that education is an act of love and courage,” implying an ethical, political, and aesthetic commitment to others. Such practices, even when episodic, indicate concrete possibilities for a form of teaching oriented toward human emancipation and the transformation of reality.

It is important to emphasize that the presence of dialogical, mediating, or humanizing practices, although fundamental to teaching committed to integral formation, does not, in itself, characterize the appropriation of Historical-Critical Pedagogy. HCP is not reducible to a set of progressive pedagogical attitudes, nor should it be confused with a generic notion of reflective teaching. Rather, it constitutes a systematized pedagogical theory, grounded in historical-dialectical materialism, which requires theoretical consciousness, political intentionality, and an understanding of education as a mediating social practice (Saviani, 2005; 2013).

In this sense, training in licensure programs may foster the development of more qualified pedagogical mediations, but it does not automatically guarantee the adoption of the assumptions of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), just as the absence of a teaching degree does not, in absolute terms, prevent the emergence of humanizing practices. What distinguishes historical-critical pedagogy is the conscious articulation between theory and practice, guided by an understanding of social contradictions and by a commitment to overcoming alienation and educational duality.

The results allow us to assert that teacher education in Professional and Technological Education (PTE) constitutes a political issue rather than merely a technical one. Within the framework of the forty years of redemocratization, rethinking teaching implies reclaiming the historical project of a democratic public school, forged in

the struggles of educators during the 1980s and 1990s, a context in which Historical-Critical Pedagogy emerged as a counter-hegemonic pedagogy. By situating knowledge as a mediation of social practice, HCP reaffirms teaching as a political act of resistance against the commodification of education and the dehumanization of educational work.

The weight of neoliberal reforms is also evident, intensified since the 1990s and consolidated through the Upper Secondary Education Reform (Law No. 13,415/2017), in the reactivation of educational duality. According to Costa and Coutinho (2018, p. 1646), such changes “remove from the State the commitment to polytechnic and integral education, reinforcing ‘notório saber’ and the replacement of teachers by technical personnel.” By fragmenting the curriculum and precarizing the teaching function, these policies distance PTE from the ideal of omnilateral formation.

From the perspectives of Saviani (2005; 2013), Tardif (2004), and Vygotsky (1999), transformative practices require critical intentionality and a humanizing commitment: it is incumbent upon the teacher to organize conditions for the critical appropriation of knowledge and the construction of social consciousness. Thus, the public school emerges as a space of dispute between two projects of society: the capitalist project, oriented toward adjustment and efficiency, and the emancipatory project, oriented toward integral formation. The presence of teachers without pedagogical training reflects the predominance of the former; experiences grounded in mediation and dialogue embody the resistance of the latter.

In light of these considerations, it is emphasized that pedagogical mediation constitutes the inflection point of this contradiction: when absent, teaching is reduced to instruction; when present, it becomes a mediating social practice between scientific knowledge and concrete reality. Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP) therefore offers a theoretical, ethical, and political framework to guide teacher education and teaching work in Professional and Technological Education (PTE) beyond market-oriented logic. As Saviani (2013, p. 97) argues, education should promote “the passage from common sense to philosophical consciousness,” forming subjects capable of understanding and transforming the world.

By highlighting both localized advances and structural limits, the investigation contributes to understanding how teaching in PTE has materialized, unevenly, the project of a public, critical, and emancipatory education. Thus, the urgency of teacher education policies that articulate labor, science, culture, and technology as inseparable dimensions of integral human formation is reaffirmed, as is the need to repoliticize teaching as a transformative social practice.

Final Considerations

The evidence demonstrates that teacher education in Professional and Technological Education (PTE) constitutes one of the central axes for consolidating a public, democratic, and emancipatory education. Students' perceptions reveal that pedagogical practice remains tensioned between technical competence and the absence of didactic-pedagogical mediation, which weakens the integration between theory and practice and limits the humanistic dimension of the formative process. It was found that non-licensed academic training is associated with greater difficulties in conducting critical and dialogical educational practices, although the mere possession of a teaching degree does not, in itself, guarantee transformative teaching. It is therefore necessary to expand policies for initial and continuing pedagogical education so that PTE teachers can understand the complexity of the educational process and the political role they play in the formation of workers and citizens.

The analysis, guided by historical-dialectical materialism, showed that students' perceptions do not constitute individual opinions, but rather concrete expressions of the structural contradictions of Brazilian education. By revealing the conflict between technical knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, the study points to the urgency of reconstructing teaching work from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), which understands the school as a mediation between theory and social practice and the teacher as a historical, mediating, and transformative subject.

The findings also reveal that the advance of neoliberal rationality in educational policies threatens the historical project of redemocratizing public schooling. By privileging employability, flexibilization, and individual performance,

neoliberalism empties education of its social meaning and shifts teaching toward a technicist mode of practice. Reaffirming Historical-Critical Pedagogy as the ethical and political horizon of teacher education is, therefore, an act of resistance, one that repositions educational work as a social practice oriented toward human emancipation and the construction of a just and democratic society.

Although there are teaching experiences that express the principles of Historical-Critical Pedagogy (HCP), such as dialogue, problematization, and formative intentionality, the majority of the practices observed remain restricted to the instrumental dimension of technical education. Repoliticizing teacher education is thus a historical and urgent task: it means recognizing the teacher as an organic intellectual of the working class, responsible for socializing scientific and philosophical knowledge and for fostering students' critical consciousness.

Accordingly, this study, whose objective was to analyze students' perceptions in Professional and Technological Education (PTE) regarding the didactic-pedagogical practices developed by teachers, identifying the extent to which they engage with Historical-Critical Pedagogy and with the ideal of integral human formation, reaffirms that overcoming the contradictions of professional education depends on the articulation between labor, science, technology, and culture as the foundations of an omnilateral form of education.

By revealing students' voices as expressions of a contradictory reality, the research contributes to the reconstruction of the public school as a space of resistance and hope, reaffirming the role of teaching in consolidating the historical project of redemocratizing Brazilian education. In line with the principles of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, repoliticizing teacher education means reaffirming an ethical and political commitment to a public, polytechnic, and socially referenced education, one capable of forming critical, creative subjects who are conscious of their role in transforming social reality.

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