

Teachers' Work and Professionalization: The promised land or dream denied?

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Abstract

The goal of this article is to discuss the process of teachers' professionalization, debating the risks of the neo-liberal discourse on professionalization in the context of conservative educational reform, particularly in Brazil. Teachers' professionalization is understood as a process immersed in unequal relations of race, gender, and social class. In this sense, it is closely related to process of proletarianization, feminization, and racial democracy. Alongside the aspects above mentioned is also considered the relations between teachers' professionalization and globalization of the market based on neo-liberal economic model in order to understand clearly what teachers are currently experiencing in their labor process in terms of pedagogical autonomy and control.

Introduction

In recent years, the educational restructuring¹ that is being planned and designed in Brazil has elevated teacher education and assessment processes as two of the central points of its agenda. In the process, the assessment of teachers' work, the education of teachers, professionalization, the career statutes, and many other aspects, have become basic elements in the dominant discourse.² Therefore, it is important to problematize the discourse on professionalization in the form in which it is being conducted. Professionalization has to be contested as a consensual category on which everyone agrees.

The goal of this text is to discuss the process of teachers' professionalization as a promised land and a denied dream, while at the same time debating the risks of the

discourse on professionalization present in neo-liberal and conservative educational reforms, particularly in Brazil. The possibility of real gains in the direction of teachers' professionalization is directly related to the demystification of unachievable dreams – many times promised, but almost always denied –, and is also related to the articulation of possible dreams – many times utopian, but immanent in the current social practices of teachers.

The professionalization of teaching has been a recurrent theme throughout the history of education in Brazil, as much by the fact that the teachers' movement continually demands working conditions for a real professionalization, as well as by the fact that the debate has been brought up by those authorities and governments in power, principally in times of educational reforms. Sometimes the emphasis has been made by the labor movement. Sometimes the emphasis has been made by the conservative reformers. The subject has been, in the first case, historically presented in a systematic form, increasing or decreasing its appearance depending on the correlation of forces that are present in the political battles. In the second case, professionalization frequently has been used to combat the teaching staff; almost always it is used to blame teachers for deficiencies in education. In the latter case, professionalization arises as a solution to all problems and justifies profound changes at different levels of the educational system. Recently, this political vision has been accompanied by proposals for teacher assessment as a requirement to improve the quality of teaching and teacher education programs (pre-service and in-service).³ This is also an important step in achieving a “genuine” professionalization (Veiga, 1998.)

This process has been extremely ambiguous and contradictory. The search for professionalization, on one hand, has been intertwined with the teachers' struggles for pedagogical autonomy. On the other hand, it has been intertwined with attempts to control teachers' work. Obviously, each one of these tendencies is subordinated to the political and pedagogical vision of professionalization of each active proponent and agent.

Professionalization, as a historical struggle by the teachers' movement, has been part of a strategy to achieve greater autonomy. This could be seen in the liberal movements which demanded more professionalism in teachers' practices to combat the missionary orientation, strongly influenced principally by Catholicism, in order to

join the teaching profession. Even today these principles are amply diffused in society and internalized as “natural” virtues of the teaching profession (Kreutz, 1986).

The struggles for professionalization have been intertwined with the search for strengthening and expanding teachers’ autonomy. Simultaneously, in a broader sense, it has helped teachers to resist the proletarianization of teachers’ work (Hypolito, 1995, 1997).

One could identify in the official discourse⁴ of many in power a formal recognition of the need for teachers’ professionalization, which is reproduced in the strengthening of a discourse on the appropriateness and urgency of teachers’ professionalization. However, there have been visible indications that this discourse has been used more for creating an illusion that significant steps are being taken in that direction, when, in fact, what has been happening is the creation of educational and administrative policies that serve to deny instead of affirm professional practices.

1. Teachers’ professionalization: promised dream

It is important to rethink the idea of teaching as it is understood today, which is broadly thought as a result of the concept of teaching as conceptualized by the church. In the beginnings of capitalism the existence of a specialized institution with the task of educating continually became more necessary (Enguita, 1989). The institution that was most prepared to perform this task was the church which had just come from a more specific way of doing that, centered on the teaching of reading and writing in order to divulge and propagate religious texts.⁵ In particular, the schools were in the churches and convents, and formal education was administered by the clergy.

The resulting process of urbanization from capitalist relations demanded the expansion of schooling in such a way that the clergy was no longer sufficient to meet the demand. Thus, the church became more willing to accept secular “teachers” with the true “calling” for collaborating in the task of teaching reading and writing. But, as Kreutz affirms (1986, p. 13), this task could not be performed by just any outsider, they “*should have first **professed** their faith and sworn fidelity to the principles of the church.*” The idea of teaching as part of priesthood increased in that period and is still

present today as a discursive form, which has suffered alterations but without changing its essence.

Nevertheless, this perspective was not linearly constructed. Even though the church controlled education and had strong ideological control over society, political, ideological, and cultural oppositions were very strong. The rise of liberalism and the consolidation of the republican state dramatically exposed the contradictions and conflicts between the priests' vision of teaching and the professional vision of teaching. The propositions that were articulated by professional associations and movements in the last century included the adoption of liberal principles, struggles for professional organizations, specialization of functions and rejection of non-school related functions, secular teaching and the strengthening of the public character of education. On the other hand, the Church feverishly attacked these principles and reaffirmed its own principles founded in priesthood and vocation.⁶

In the meantime, the liberal and republican state advanced in the development of capitalist relations, many times with an uneven rhythm and non-synchronic characteristics. The increase of urbanization and industrialization, characteristic of capitalist evolution, demanded the development of a public system of education (Lawn, 1987). It was in this movement that the teaching profession became organized by what could be called a process of "*funcionarização*"⁷ of the teaching profession, which included two processes I want to discuss. Before proceeding, however, it is important to point out that although the State has played an important role in defining, designing, and, sometimes, imposing many aspects of teachers' professionalization, teachers contest the state's role in many ways. In other words, the State should not be understood as a fixed entity but as an arena of social and political struggles. It is in this arena that hegemony over professionalization is established. From this perspective, the State is understood as something constantly in motion.

The first process involved the State assimilating a significant part of teachers' demands for professionalization. The second process involved the State's increasing control over the teaching profession. In the first case, the State admitted the necessity of regulating certain aspects that are part of professionalism, such as the regulation of who could exercise teachers' functions, the organization plus the recognition of a professional career, and minimally the necessity to organize courses on teaching skills

(Normal School)⁸, etc. Clearly, this does not mean that those goals have been reached; it simply means that those elements were presented. In the second case, which in large part resulted from the former, the State ultimately obtained more control over the organization of the system (Schools, inspections, school principals, etc.), over the curriculum (contents, exams, textbooks), and consequently over the labor process (methods, didactic materials, pedagogical supervision, etc.).

One could say that professionalism generally was assumed as official discourse, as a promise, as something to be achieved. Even though one could say little was achieved, teachers' professionalization little by little became more present in dominant discourse. No one contests professionalism, no one doubts that it is a good solution, and that it is always a goal to be achieved. Thus, teachers' professionalism, as official discourse, ends up exercising a disciplinary, controlling, and ideological function in the way it subordinates the discussions of the concrete reality of teachers' work to something that should be sought in another place at another time. In this sense, professionalism as discursive reality ends up having a material existence in teacher education. For example, the real and material conditions under which teachers' activity is performed has shown that forms of control, deskilling processes, and the lowering of salaries are more present while opportunities to access cultural goods which decisively favor the process of professionalization, such as books, cinema, music, and high quality professional education programs, diminish. Thus, the promise that professionalization is "the" solution is strongly and constantly present, even though deprofessionalizing processes are the emphasis.

Even though the State has admitted and incorporated the notion of professionalization, at least formally, it did not completely reject the notion of teaching as a "vocation" and "mission". This persisted despite the ascendancy of liberalism, the growth of the public educational system, and the emergence of teaching as a professional career. On the contrary, in spite of these apparent changes, this discourse persists under different forms. For example, sometimes the teaching profession appears in educational discourse as a feminine profession, as an activity suited for "feminine abilities." Sometimes it is present as a moral devotion to work with cultural, social, or economically disadvantaged groups,⁹ yet sometimes it appears as a defense of

ideological virtues of the State, the country, or the family (the dictatorship of 1964 in Brazil, for example).

In short, teaching results from a historical process that included elements of a liberal tradition of professionalism and elements of religious ideologies of teaching as a mission. As a result, one can say that teachers' professionalism in Brazil has actually realized very little, but exists as a discursive reality, as a promised dream always pushed to a distant and undetermined future.

2. Teachers' professionalization: the denied dream

It is not possible to understand professionalization as a homogeneous form when the subjects of these processes are immersed in unequal relations of race, gender, and social class. There are various indications that a “harmonious” acceptance of the growth of teachers’ professionalization, more than contributing to the achievement of the promised land, has concretely contributed in many cases to the denial of the dream. Contrary to what is proclaimed, teachers’ work has been subsumed by proletarian forms of control that reduce its pedagogical autonomy. Simultaneously, the labor process of teaching has undergone profound transformations such as the process of feminization, which is strongly intertwined with the process of professionalization, deprofessionalization, and proletarianization (Hypolito, 1991 and 1997). Along the same lines, teachers have been placed in a situation of social exclusion with other ethnic and racial groups. As I will try to demonstrate here, teachers’ professionalization cannot be understood separately from class, race, and gender dynamics.

The process of proletarianization, amply discussed in literature, does not necessarily mean the impossibility of teachers’ professionalization, although it has been denied in various aspects. Even though it has been constantly obfuscated by other discourses that make it difficult for teachers to identify and understand it, the proletarianization of and the processes of intensification of teachers’ work, in large sense, define the labor process – very real in the day to day school life – and are related to teachers’ social class position (Apple, 1982; 1986).¹⁰ The discourse of professionalization, in certain aspects, reinforces another common discourse on the nature of the teachers’ social class position, which is that it is intellectual work and, thus, has a different

configuration that of other workers, which reaffirms, among other arguments, the middle class position of the teaching staff. I wish by no means to deny that there are still persistent elements that can characterize the teaching staff as middle class. Grounded in Apple's arguments in *Teachers and Texts* (1986), I analyzed the ambivalence of teachers' social class position in another work (Hypolito, 1997), in which I considered teachers to be in a contradictory position of class with characteristics of both the middle and working class. I simply want to present the fact that the majority of teachers in Brazilian public schools work with the working class, their kin are working class, and ultimately they live in the culture of the working class, yet they are considered middle class. This causes certain characteristics of proletarianization and deprofessionalization to be obscured, allowing autonomy to be perceived where none exists; where there is not financial compensation there is spiritual satisfaction serving underprivileged groups; where there is not professionalism there is a mission. The myth that teaching is different, intellectualized, middle class work, has helped hide those processes which proletarianize – or tend to proletarianize – and transform professionalization into something distant. In reality, the promised land is the denied dream.

Certainly that process is not the result of some conspiratorial action of power, secretly planned with the purpose of deskilling the task of teaching, but rather the result of socially constructed processes, which are circumscribed within a given political, economic, and cultural reality. Thus, various political actions of resistance and contestation, more or less conscious, are part of this process and evidently include other dynamics and not just those of social class.

The feminization of the teaching profession has been a long and drawn out process and has had unparalleled importance in the process of professionalization. This is an extremely complex subject that opens infinite possibilities of analysis.¹¹ In this text, I will limit myself to those aspects I consider relevant to my central argument.¹²

Feminization of the teaching profession, even though it seems extremely natural nowadays, was the target of strong resistance both on the part of professional teacher associations – mainly representing and represented by men – that believed feminization to be prejudicial to professionalization, as well as by the conservative sectors that assigned women only to the private space of the domestic realm.¹³

At the same time, the feminization of the teaching profession, as well as access to schooling – principally the admission to Normal School¹⁴ – signified an advance for female occupation of public spaces. This occurred in terms of access to cultural goods (schooling, literature, etc.) as well as in terms of political and social participation, even though it is still limited. In this sense, feminization of the teaching profession can be understood as a feminine emancipation.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that deskilling and deprofessionalization, including salary-lowering policies, worked hand in hand with feminization. The patriarchal tradition of women's submission to male authority and the relative inexperience of political participation by women in Brazil have contributed to the acceleration of these processes, however it is risky to say that they would not have occurred without feminization. Nevertheless, the myth of teaching as a motherly activity, suited for women "experienced" in the task of taking care of children, collaborated with the withdrawing of the promised dream to more distant places.

The condition of women in the teaching profession is still extremely unequal, even though women fill the majority of teaching positions. Some disciplines or areas of knowledge are considered more "professional" and continue to be reserved for the masculine realm, such as philosophy and physics. Women frequently deal with a double workload that includes all the domestic work as a "second shift". Among other things, this limits their civic and political participation (in relation to political parties, unions, and other social movements) as well as their ability to attend training programs, which would allow them to obtain higher qualifications, and professional advancement. In accordance with this, the relative number of male teachers in prestigious teaching positions and administrative positions with authority is much higher than that of female teachers. These circumstances are repeated when one analyses aspects of teacher certification and licensing.

Still it would be inaccurate to say that female teachers simply reinforce politics of control and domination over the teaching profession. On the contrary, many times they silently introduce specific forms of resistance. For example, when new techniques and educational technologies are introduced to teachers, it is frequent that female teachers reject certain technical orientations, even though formally they "accept" them. At the same time that they might reject these "new" orientations they

insist on maintaining their pedagogical practices that are grounded in their own teaching experiences. Other times resistance occurs with pure and simple denial of such “orientating” discussions, with the search for subterfuges such as “chit-chatting”, “exchanging recipes”, “selling jewelry”¹⁵; ultimately some form of avoidance.¹⁶ In this case, what might be understood as a lack of professional competence could really be signifying an affirmation of pedagogical autonomy in the sense that it ends up existing as an option for reinforcing the procedures of instruction learned and developed in their own teaching labor process. In reality, considering the women second shift (domestic duties work as well as professional responsibilities and teachers’ work), this rejection brings in and of itself a rejection of intensification processes. These forms of resistance, many times silent, expose the fallacy that “technology”, “innovation”, and “technical-scientific solution” discourses are fundamental elements in professionalization, when many times, in practice, the work load is effectively increased, not streamlined, particularly when performed by women.¹⁷

Race is more closely related to the subject of professionalization as denial rather than affirmation. Realistically, in Brazil, there are some studies dedicated to problematizing this question. The myth of racial democracy has been devastating since it camouflages racial relations in Brazil.¹⁸ Undeniably, in economic, political, social, and cultural terms, the most excluded group has been Afro-Brazilians. In particular, when one refers to education, this exclusion has been immense (Silva et. al., 1996). The number of teachers originally from the Black community is extremely small compared to the corresponding number of the total population. It is known that these communities are part of the most excluded sectors of Brazilian society (Hypolito, 2001).

For many candidates in the teaching profession, principally when they complete Normal School and/or College (Teacher Education Programs),¹⁹ obtaining a teaching position could mean upward social mobility²⁰. At the same time, it could easily be observed that teachers originally from more excluded ethnic-racial groups are working in the poorer regions, have less educational qualifications, earn lower salaries, and work under the worst possible working conditions (Hypolito, 2001). Race, as an issue and subject, is generally ignored in curriculum in Brazil. Critical

treatments of race are rarely found in textbooks, didactic materials, or required program content. School achievement data are not analyzed according to racial categories. When the question of race is presented in the curriculum it generally reinforces the notion of whiteness as the gold standard. Chiefly, when race is included in those materials, it appears as a denial of racial conflicts, reinforcing the myth of racial democracy (Silva, 1992; Silva et al., 1996). In this sense, the myth of racial democracy also has strengthened the discourse of professionalism as a promise.

The final aspect that I want to discuss in relation to the denial of professionalism is in regard to teacher education programs. Even though legal requirements for the teaching profession are beginning to require higher levels of education (advanced degrees) and the years of schooling have increased (the minimum being, in many cases, a teacher education program obtained at the high school level – Normal School), the actual educational programs for teachers have undergone a process of weakening and deskilling. This has been the subject of debate in recent years.²¹ More recently this process can be identified in the new governmental policies in this area, in which the orientation for teacher education programs is clearly with short-term courses, distance education without the necessary structural support, and other designated “innovative” experiences. Even if these processes of pre-service teacher education were appropriate, one cannot forget the debates presented in past decades, from which we learned that education (formation), de-formation, and deskilling processes continue to have a significant impact on the labor process. Thus, not only forms of technical and ideological control, but also awful work conditions in which teachers have to work interfere with what one understands to be teacher education – broadly defined – and professionalization. In other words, there are subjective and objective aspects that construct and are constructed in the labor process. These aspects determine and define teachers’ practices more than the pre-service education²² (Hypolito, 1994). This tells us that professionalization is not only professional education, but that it involves prerogatives that guarantee better working conditions and respect the already established teaching practices gained through teachers’ professional experience.

The struggle for professionalization has been one of many strategies adopted by the teachers’ movement to contest and resist forms of technical as well as ideological

control, which historically have been significant in denying professional autonomy. In all dimensions of the pedagogical process teachers have been losing their authority. It has occurred in relation to aspects involved in decisions about the ultimate purpose of teaching –why it is done– as much as in relation to aspects involved in “technical” decisions about the proceedings of teaching –how it is done. Political pedagogical decisions are everyday more distant from where they should be applied. To affirm professionalization consequently demonstrates that there were and are more democratic forms to organize education and teaching. It means that processes of social and cultural exclusion result from political choices. It also implies that the promised land has been denied due to political processes –processes that as such can be interrupted and modified. Or would teachers’ professionalization be an unachievable dream?

3. Teachers’ professionalization: The unachievable dream?

The recent process of globalization of the market is based on neo-liberal political and economic models that have been extensively implanted. The changes in technological development propelled by capitalism have provoked profound modifications in the organization of labor, in particular, and society, in general. The imposition of market logic in all institutions and spheres of social and cultural life has been the chosen path for neo-liberalism to conquer economic and political hegemony. This process has been moved forward by the articulation of what has been named the New Right. This alliance, which unites neo-liberal, conservative, and religious sectors along with certain sectors of the upper middle class, has been characterized as the Conservative Modernization (Apple, 1996b).

This restructuring of society has required a restructuring of education. In Brazil and Latin America this restructuring has followed a conservative educational reform model initiated in the 80’s in countries such as the United States and England, whose model has been disseminated in other countries of the world.²³ This process of educational restructuring, in part constructed by the processes of societal restructuring, directly reaches the organizational logic of education and the schools. The passage of public control of education and the schools, administered by society (political sphere), to private control (economic sphere), directly administered by the market, according to the ideas of neo-liberalism, tends to reduce the relative

autonomy of education in relation to the economy. Tomaz Tadeu da Silva points out that the “(...) *neo-liberal educational reform radically modifies the indirect connection that education maintains with the economy, making this relationship **directly** dependent on a specific economic logic*” (Silva, 1997, p.166). Schools end up being more directly regulated by the rules of the market and the economy, and its organization is continually becoming administered and evaluated by “technical” criteria of efficiency and productivity. The effects on teachers’ work are profound, as one can see in Silva’s analysis:

First, one can hope for an intervention of the neo-liberal governments to directly alter the plans of teacher education, instituting more independent teachers’ *training* mechanisms from universities and more directly towards technical and ideological necessities of the new model of social and educational organization. One can foresee that under this orientation, the curricula and the approach of these training plans are predominantly technical, administrative, practical, and pragmatic, reproducing the preoccupation with efficiency and productivity that is being applied to elementary, middle, and high schools with the consequent displacement of fields and approaches of more political, social, and cultural inclination as well as areas of teacher education that, even though they do not directly oppose pragmatic orientations, can be seen as irrelevant (Silva, 1997, p.166).

The conservative educational reform currently undertaken is also characterized by an apparently paradoxical idea. On the one hand, it advocates a weak state (minimum) based on the premise that all things public are inefficient, placing the blame for the educational crisis on administrative inefficiency, teachers’ incompetence, and unions, etc. As a solution, it presents public school submission to the discipline of the market, producing pseudo-participatory administrative forms as post-Fordist models (Total Quality Management, for instance) and decentralizing administrative-financial aspects in the name of school autonomy. On the other hand, it also produces a strong state which exercises centralized control over fundamental aspects of the day-to-day life of the school, such as: the definition of a national curriculum (or parameters); teacher education programs linked with mass media and communication networks (principally electronics), which include pedagogical packets and the use of equipment to facilitate the access of large communication groups to the schools, strictly linked with the computer market and other technologies; control over textbooks, and so on.

The impact the conservative model has on teachers' work is evident in general, but focuses even more specifically on (and is visible in) teachers' labor process. Even though the discourse of the search for professionalization is central in neo-liberal propositions, which include odd notions of autonomy, the suggested measures tend to reinforce deskilling and deprofessionalization as a vast amount of literature on teachers' work has demonstrated. This occurs to the degree that the two processes are happening simultaneously. On one hand, the capitalist market continually regulates and controls more directly the school, entailing educational aims in accordance with the market's teleological vision. On the other hand, the submission and control of the means and the contents upon which teachers' work is based, what has been gotten through definitions of what should be taught (school knowledge) and how this should be taught (teaching process) during the school year. In fact, they are not two processes, but one multifaceted process of ideological and technical control of education.

This aggressive conservative movement tends to be omnipresent and overwhelming and could transform the dream of professionalization into something unattainable. However, the contradictions inherent in struggles for hegemony indicate that not everything is about domination. Counter-hegemonic processes of resistance are present and there are positive signals that teachers' political and pedagogical practices are becoming stronger. I can give two different examples to demonstrate a little of what is being affirmed: some actions of unions and other emancipatory experiences.

One must understand that professionalization is not a problem with an exclusively technical solution and that material, cultural, and social conditions of teachers' lives are fundamental in the issues surrounding professionalism. Various teachers' unions have had a fundamental role in hindering and slowing the progress of the conservative reform and in deconstructing the neo-liberal educational discourse. The example of two states – Rio Grande do Sul and Minas Gerais – can illustrate this phenomenon. All of the changes in education of a conservative orientation, introduced by the recent conservative governments, were not able to be completely concretized. Issues of a more pedagogical nature also did not make it to the classroom.²⁴ The teachers and their union were never included as privileged interlocutors for the elaboration of these policies that usually were not only oriented toward market interests, but also did not

present positive alternatives for teachers in terms of professional careers or salaries. The teachers' and union's actions were crucial in blocking the consolidation of a clearly conservative educational project. Sometimes these actions were strikes, demonstrations, and protests, which dealt with the contestation of official policies and the attainment of better working conditions. There were also more "silent" actions, usually when some imposed pedagogical orientation was being implemented. However, today it cannot be affirmed that there were significant advances in terms of salary, professionalization, and work conditions; one can visualize projects such as Total Quality, among others, as simply failed attempts due to the absolute lack of support from teachers and civil society.

The other brief but important example refers to educational experiences in the administration of popular governments. Particularly in a country where popular education is very significant, there are numerous interesting experiences that I could list (schools in landless settlements, experience with municipal governments, communal infantile education, labor education for unionists, political education addressed to social movements, etc.). However, I am going to briefly present two examples of what I am trying to demonstrate: Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte.²⁵ In the first example, the government of the capital of Rio Grande do Sul has been governed by the Popular Front for three terms²⁶, and has organized an interesting experiment in education²⁷, that is evidently more solid because it is part of a larger participatory and democratic process (democratic administration and participatory budgeting). The Citizen School project (Escola Cidadã)²⁸ has been constructed in accord with debates that took place with the local community, teachers, the academic community, and unions. The changes have been directed towards all aspects of school life: curricular change (introduction of cycles of formation, instead of formal grades), democratic administration, participatory planning, the creation of a school board council, election for principals, teacher training programs, and special attention for young/adult education and pre-school education.

Referring more directly to professionalization, which is the main focus of this paper, there have been significant advances in terms of salary (considerably higher than in other capitals, cities, and Brazilian states), working conditions, and teacher training programs. Teacher training programs have been linked to a system integrated with

seminars, congresses, meetings, and conferences that try to put the teaching profession in the center of the discussion of ideas, experiences, projects, and necessary activities for the development of their work.

In Belo Horizonte, where the municipal government is also in its third term of Popular Front, a similar experience is underway with the Plural School program (Escola Plural).²⁹ In Belo Horizonte, besides the changes in the contents, the curriculum, and school organization, a creative proposal of teacher training program (in service) is being achieved with CAPE (Center for the Improvement of Educational Professionals)³⁰, with activities including courses, seminars, production and distribution of pedagogical materials, research, and the supervision of pedagogical work in the schools.

It is important to establish that these experiences, although not always very well accepted by teachers and their unions, have been constituted as a counter-hegemonic referent and, in this sense, have helped to deconstruct the conservative reform as something inevitable. On the contrary, these experiences show that professionalization takes other directions beyond those obtained in pre-service education. The teaching practice, as it has been problematized in these experiences, is part of the participatory and democratic process, is part of the valorization of teachers in political, pedagogical, and professional terms, and is articulated in social movements more broadly organized in society.

As I have said before, the access to more advanced schooling does not necessarily mean a greater access to cultural goods. This implies that professionalization is the result of the improvement of education not only in terms of quantity but also of quality. In an unequal society where cultural goods are unequally distributed, professionalization depends not only on material conditions to be developed but also depends on processes of teacher education that socialize the different sort of knowledge and pedagogical productions available, linking this production with different socio-cultural contexts and with the teaching experience of the day to day school life.

Thus, it does not seem that professionalization is an unachievable dream. However, objective and subjective conditions need to be constructed to obstruct or to make difficult the deprofessionalizing processes promoted by conservative policies.

Conclusion

More now than ever words such as autonomy and professionalization can mean very different things. The meaning of professionalization and autonomy can vary depending on who is using the word and under what circumstances. From the teachers' point of view, who are immersed in dynamics of class, race, and gender relations within which they construct their identities and discursive practices, the meaning of professionalization is connected to a quality education, working conditions that favor reflexive work, control over teaching and learning processes, and the democratization of school organization.

From a conservative or neo-liberal perspective, autonomy can mean only decentralizing certain pedagogical-administrative processes of school life (management) which are apparently autonomous, but are really regulated by dynamics and mechanisms defined by other instances (in and by the market).

Professionalization in this sense can mean "well-prepared" teachers who know how to apply pedagogical theories, control technologies, and adequately follow the curriculum and the textbooks, all "scientifically" defined by highly qualified technicians and supervisors (commonly middle class white men).

Here I only unfold these two possible versions of professionalization to exemplify the main polarizations that exist today in society. However, multiple discourses on professionalization can be identified. Even though certain regularities that mark a predominant discourse exist, the variations and tensions with teachers' interests, not always common interests, might be easily found.

As I have tried to demonstrate, teacher professionalization in Brazil has been a historic struggle of the teachers' movement characterized by inclusions and exclusions, promises, denials, advances, and setbacks. Many discourses have been constructed, deconstructed, corroborated, assimilated, or rejected. Many dreams were promised, many were denied. However, professionalization still continues to be an

important part of the agenda in the contemporary dispute among different social and educational projects (Contreras Domingo, 1998).

To speak of professionalization as a possible dream does not mean a nostalgic return to primitive forms of organization of the school labor process, in which teaching was an autonomous, untouchable, all knowing entity that defined the ends of teaching (if this professional entity ever really existed!). From my point of view, professionalization should be understood from a perspective that respects autonomy, defends participation of the community and consolidates emancipatory educational practices. Professionalism must signify the improvement of professional work as well as the betterment of the social quality of teaching. Thus, communities, groups, and social movements have to be considered as much as the social quality of education, and not reduced to the status of “clients” as dictated by neo-liberalism, but as agents that possess race, gender, and class identities that many times may collide with teachers’ identities. In this sense, professionalization has to include the political sense of fostering the idea that the definitions of curriculum, contents, and methods, should result less in the “illuminated” knowledge “neutrally” selected by experts and more as the interrelations of the cultural realities in which the educational act is circumscribed. In this sense, professionalization will be achieved by it ceasing to be a dream; it will become constructed as a real (possible) utopia.

Notes

1. Educational restructuring has been widely discussed in analyses related either to Brazilian or other Latin American contexts (among many other works, see Gentili and Silva, 1994; Gentili, 1995 and 1998; Del Pino, Ferreira and Hypolito, 1996). Similar changes have been experienced in the majority of all countries as a part of the processes of the globalization and political and economic restructuring of capitalism (Santos, 1995; Apple, 1996a and 1996b; Whitty, Power & Halpin, 1998).

2. Important studies about teachers’ work, post-Fordist models, and educational restructuring under globalization can be found in Menter, I., Muschamp, Y., Nicholls, P., Ozga, J. (1997); Smyth, J. and Shacklock, G. (1998); Robertson, S. (2000); and Smyth, J. et al. (2000).

3. Lula's administration policies for teachers certification and accountability include this.

4. Here, discourse is understood as something that has material existence and can provoke important effects on concrete reality, which means that multiple discourses have a material existence and constitute and reinforce discursive practices (for instance, gender, race, and class identities). I strongly agree with Ball's critical and poststructuralist arguments (1994). Ball argues that there is a master discourse, or dominant discourse, that defines and is defined in relation to discursive practices, which are based on particular economic, cultural, and political materialities. This means that some discourses have more power than others. In this sense, for example, race, class, and gender are dynamics produced in this dialectical movement (producer/product). As emphasized by Apple (1996c), language and discourses must be considered in our analysis toward a better understanding of those dynamics, connecting discourse, ideology, and material conditions (cultural, political, and economic).

5. Religious texts were a special political instrument, mainly during religious conflicts between different churches and religious groups (see Frago, 1993).

6. More in depth analysis of these aspects can be found in Hypolito (1997), specifically in chapter 1 – The Historical Constitution of Teachers' Work.

7. "Funcionarização" means the process through which teachers and others professional groups have become civil servants or workers for the state.

8. Normal School refers to a kind of school (usually High School level) that trains teachers, chiefly for the elementary grades.

10. For a more detailed discussion about this in Brazil see Hypolito (1994 and 1997).

11. For a more detailed analysis on this subject in Brazil see, for example, Guacira Louro's article (1989); and chapter 2 in Hypolito (1997), "Trabalho Docente e Relações de Gênero" (Teachers' work and gender relations), where the process of feminization of teaching in Brazil is analyzed in more detail.

12. Recent research lead by the initiative of CNTE (Teachers National Union) and by UnB (University of Brasilia) shows a tendency to defeminize the teaching profession. This is new information that urgently needs to be discussed, even though in this text I will not pay attention to this aspect.

13. Demartini and Antunes (1993) show interesting opposition, above all in São Paulo, in relation to this question, and also describe the arduous trajectory that female teachers confront in an absolutely unequal struggle with male teachers.

14. See endnote 8.

15. Basically because of low salaries, it is very common in Brazilian public schools to find teachers supplementing their income through involvement in secondary occupations, such as selling jewelry. According to CNTE (National Confederation of Workers in Education), teachers' average wage is US\$177.83 per month (assuming an exchange value of US\$1.00 to 2.3 Brazilian Reals – June 2001).

16. There are several qualitative works analyzing these behaviors, demonstrating in detail the implications of this kind of behavior that, at the same time, presents characteristics of conformation and resistance.

17. Apple analyzes these processes in various texts (Apple, 1982; 1986, and 1996a).

18. “(...) the criteria to classify and categorize the official information on race in Brazil are deeply biased in terms of methodology and ideology. This procedure is not clear as to whom is defined as White or Dark. Then, the number of White people in Brazil is overestimated and the people who come from Black African origin is diluted in a general category called Dark.” (Hypolito, 2001) This aspect also has serious implications for racial identities.

19. I use the word “principally” because there are teachers working in Brazilian schools who have not been trained in Normal School or College.

20. In March of this year (2004) the Brazilian Government has announced that Federal Universities can consider affirmative actions, such as percentiles, as a policy for reparation of the historical segregation of black people in Brazil.

21. This can be demonstrated, among others, by the efforts that resulted in the establishment of the Anfope (National Association of Teacher Education Programs). Rich and diversified experiences of teacher education programs can be found all over Brazil, but the official track of direction of educational policies for teacher education programs has been impervious to propositions developed by the teachers' movement and by academic entities in the area, such as Anfope.

23. See references in footnote 2.

24. Some administrative plans had practical effects but were contested from the very beginning until they were cancelled.

25. Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte, respectively, are the capitals of the Brazilian states Rio Grande do Sul (South region) and Minas Gerais (Southeast region).

26. The Popular Front is a political alliance established by leftist parties and organizations in order to participate in elections. This political articulation has resulted in important victories, and the Popular Front plays large roles in many local and state level governments. Since January 2001, the Popular Front is administering its fourth term.

27. This experience tends to be amplified in the state since the Popular Front won recent elections and has been administering Rio Grande do Sul since January of 1999.

28. Citizen School is the name of the educational project that has been implemented in Porto Alegre by the Popular Front. It is mentioned in Apple's new book (2001), Chapter 7. Also it is possible to see in detail in Porto Alegre City Secretariat of Education, "Cycles of Formation: Politic-Pedagogical Proposal for the Citizen's School," *Cadernos Pedagogicos* 9 (April 1999), pp.1-111.

29. Plural School is the name of the educational project that is been implemented in Belo Horizonte by the Popular Front. In many aspects it is similar to Citizen School.

30. CAPE is a center for the improvement of teacher training programs (in-service). Its members are recruited among teachers. Any teacher can apply to work with CAPE, and if accepted each CAPE member is allowed to work for at most two years, after

which they have to return to the classroom. Thus, membership is always in transition. Despite this transition, because only 1/3 of the CAPE members are replaced each year, there is always a core group working together.

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