

DISCOURSES ABOUT LABOR REFORM IN NEW HIGH SCHOOL TEXTBOOKS

*DISCURSOS SOBRE A REFORMA TRABALHISTA EM LIVROS DIDÁTICOS DO
NOVO ENSINO MÉDIO*

*DISCURSOS SOBRE REFORMA LABORAL EN NUEVOS LIBROS DE TEXTO DE
NUEVO ENSEÑANZA MEDIA*



Élida Karla Alves de BRITO
e-mail: elida.brito17@hotmail.com



Francisco Vieira da SILVA
e-mail: francisco.vieiras@ufersa.edu.br

How to reference this paper:

BRITO, É. K. A. de; SILVA, F. V. da. Discourses about labor reform in new High School Textbooks. **Rev. Educação e Fronteiras**, Dourados, v. 14, n. 00, e024003, 2024. e-ISSN: 2237-258X. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30612/eduf.v14i00.18640>



| Submitted: 12/02/2024
| Revisions required: 24/04/2024
| Approved: 03/06/2024
| Published: 16/07/2024

ABSTRACT: This research breaks into the reformist scenario that marked Brazil during the government of Michel Temer, specifically, the objective of this study is to analyze speeches about the Labor Reform implemented by Law 13,467 of 2017. by the then President Michel Temer. Reformist postulations promote drastic changes in the labor scenario through total flexibility of work relations. To this end, we analyzed, based on the Foucauldian framework, statements present in textbooks that deal with the topic of work and make up the area of Applied Human and Social Sciences, approved by the National Book and Teaching Material Program, 2021 edition, in accordance with the Reform of the New Secondary Education (Law No. 13,415/2017) and the National Common Curricular Base for Secondary Education of 2018. The methodology follows a descriptive-interpretive bias of a qualitative nature. The analysis of fragments collected from five textbooks allows us to problematize that labor reform is discursive in order to meet neoliberal demands, presupposing flexible workers, who develop skills and abilities that adapt them to a framework of insecurity, deregulation, and vulnerability of the labor sector that it extends to the educational bases with a view to acting in accordance with a project of a neoliberal governmentality of the subject.

KEYWORDS: Discourse. Textbook. Labor Reform. New High School.

RESUMO: Esta pesquisa irrompe no cenário reformista que marca o Brasil durante o governo de Michel Temer, de modo específico, o objetivo deste estudo é analisar discursos sobre a Reforma Trabalhista implementada pela Lei n.º 13.467 de 2017. As postulações reformistas promovem drásticas mudanças no cenário laboral através de uma flexibilização total das relações de trabalho. Para tanto, analisamos, a partir do arcabouço foucaultiano, dizeres presentes nos livros didáticos que tratam do tema trabalho e compõem a área de Ciências Humanas e Sociais Aplicadas, aprovadas pelo Programa Nacional do Livro e do Material Didático, edição de 2021, em conformidade com a Reforma do Novo Ensino Médio (Lei n.º 13.415/2017) e com a Base Nacional Comum Curricular do Ensino Médio de 2018. A metodologia segue um viés descritivo-interpretativo de natureza qualitativa. A análise de trechos extraídos de cinco livros didáticos possibilita problematizar como a reforma trabalhista é discursivamente apresentada para atender às demandas neoliberais. Isso implica na pressuposição de trabalhadores flexíveis, capazes de desenvolver competências e habilidades que os adaptem a um ambiente de trabalho caracterizado pela insegurança, desregulamentação e vulnerabilidade. Essas condições se estendem às bases educacionais, moldando-as para operar dentro de uma lógica governamental neoliberal que orienta o comportamento do sujeito.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Discurso. Livro Didático. Reforma Trabalhista. Novo Ensino Médio.

RESUMEN: Esta investigación irrumpe en el escenario reformista que marcó a Brasil durante el gobierno de Michel Temer, específicamente, el objetivo de este estudio es analizar los discursos sobre la Reforma Laboral implementada por la Ley 13.467 de 2017 por parte del entonces presidente Michel Temer. Los postulados reformistas promueven cambios drásticos en el escenario laboral a través de una total flexibilización de las relaciones laborales. Para ello, analizamos, con base en el marco foucaultiano, enunciados presentes en los libros de texto que abordan el tema del trabajo y conforman el área de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales Aplicadas, aprobado por el Programa Nacional del Libro y Material Didáctico, edición 2021, de conformidad con la Reforma de la Nueva Educación Secundaria (Ley n° 13.415/2017) y la Base Curricular Común Nacional para la Educación Secundaria de 2018. La metodología sigue un sesgo descriptivo-interpretativo de carácter cualitativo. El análisis de fragmentos recogidos de cinco libros de texto nos permite problematizar que la reforma laboral es discursivizada para atender demandas neoliberales, presuponiendo trabajadores flexibles, que desarrollan capacidades y habilidades que los adaptan a un marco de inseguridad, desregulación y vulnerabilidad del sector laboral que se extiende a las bases educativas con miras a actuar de acuerdo con un proyecto de gubernamentalidad neoliberal del sujeto.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Discurso. Libro de texto. Reforma Laboral. Nueva Escuela Secundaria.

Introduction

Neoliberalism, despite presenting itself as an economic regime, extends its tentacles to all spheres of social life; its formulations significantly impact and undermine social rights, including labor rights. Foucault (2008a), in tracing a genealogy of subject governance practices, also describes strategies of knowledge and power through which individuals become subjected, modulated, and forged, based on strategic elements of governing life.

In essence, Foucault (2008a) understands that governmentality determines how we should recognize ourselves as individuals, defining subjectivities, or in other words, producing modes of subjectivation that are useful for governing oneself.

From this perspective, neoliberalism as a technique of governance operates through power procedures that aim to shrink the state's responsibility towards spending on individuals, making them responsible for themselves (Dardot; Laval, 2016). Furthermore, it weakens and undermines the rights and conditions of those seeking to remain in the labor market. An example of this is performance logic, which makes workers increasingly productive without guaranteed rights or security.

In the Brazilian labor scenario, significant changes began to emerge more fervently in 2017, with updates approaching neoliberal ideals through the approval of the Labor Reform (LR) under Law 13,467/2017, which implements total flexibility in labor relations (Antunes, 2020). The LR emerged in Brazil against a backdrop of political and social events that led to

the impeachment of then-President Dilma Rousseff during her second term in 2016. Faced with the onset of the crisis and the assumption of power by Michel Temer (2016), the underlying interests behind the LR expanded, primarily under the pretext of needing urgent measures to combat the high unemployment rate caused by the economic crisis.

In this scenario, the proposal to reform labor laws is discursively presented as a solution to modernize labor relations, address rising unemployment, and boost the Brazilian economy. It is important to note that since the 1990s, Brazilian labor rights have progressively been undermined, with flexibilization measures introduced as early as the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1999-2003), as Antunes (2020) observed. However, with the Labor Reform's approval, the changes in the Brazilian labor context became more evident.

According to Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 20, our translation), "[...] neoliberalism employs unprecedented techniques of power over conduct and subjectivities," which also applies to the new understanding of work and workers employed in this regime that promotes entrepreneurship, competition, flexibility, and production, placing the individual responsible for their success or failure in the market. Therefore, Dardot and Laval (2016) argue that the production of subjects articulated by neoliberal rationality aligns well with management practices used by companies, which seem to constantly evaluate employee performance.

Building on this scenario, this article focuses on the discourse surrounding the Labor Reform in textbooks of the New High School (NHS), aiming to examine whether these materials critically analyze the reform or adhere to its aspirations. The structure of the work is organized into five sections, including this introductory section. The next section discusses the concepts underpinning our research, such as the notions of work in the NHS and the concepts of discourse, utterance, and the relations of knowledge and power that are relevant. The third section outlines the methodology. The fourth section provides analyses of the textbooks in Humanities and Social Sciences regarding work, and finally, we present some concluding remarks.

Reflections on discourse, biopower, and neoliberal governmentality in the NHS

Notes on discourse and power: a Foucauldian perspective

Foucault (2010, p. 6) sought to identify, within discursive practices, how they could act to construct matrices of knowledge, aiming to investigate in these practices "[...] the rules, the game of truth and falsehood, and [...] the forms of veridiction." Foucault's intention was to

analyze the appearances, continuities, and discontinuities of discourses and the knowledge mobilized by them. In this context, the act of excavating in history the irruption of discourses also seeks to understand how knowledge is formed and emerges in a particular time and place rather than another. According to the author, "[...] it must be shown why it could not be otherwise, how it excludes any other, how it occupies in the midst of others and related to them, a place that no other could occupy" (Foucault, 2004a, p. 31, our translation).

The analytical path followed by Foucault (2004a) investigates discourses based on the regularities that constitute them and systematizes the concept of discursive formation, which, according to Foucault (2004a), is related to a certain number of statements that appear in a regime of dispersion. Further on discursive formation and its regularities, Foucault (2004a) emphasizes that to understand this concept, it is necessary to grasp four elements present in discourse, namely: *the formation of objects, enunciative modalities, strategies, and concepts*.

Foucault (2004a) examines how discursive formations, configured by the juxtaposition of statements, contribute to the formation of thematic regularities and, consequently, to the constitution of fields of knowledge. From these formulations, it is understood that discourse, in its emergence, is not neutral, as the formulation of statements already supports the understanding that:

[...] there is no statement in general, free, neutral, and independent, but always a statement that is part of a series or set, playing a role among others, relying on them, and distinguishing itself from them: it always integrates into an enunciative game, in which it has its part, however small or insignificant it may be (Foucault, 2004a, p. 112, our translation).

Thus, the discourse manifested through statements possesses a material character that realizes itself as practical, historical, and social knowledge, involving subjects in power relations that permeate them. It is from this instance, discourse as an active field of knowledge, that Foucault's work turns to the analytics of power, seeking to scrutinize its genesis or, in other words, its genealogy.

According to Machado (2012, p. 120, our translation), "[...] genealogy is a historical analysis of the political conditions of possibility of discourses." It refers, therefore, to an analysis of power to explain how knowledge emerge and what external conditions of possibility allow their appearance and articulation in fields such as politics. From this perspective, it is valid to emphasize that, according to Foucauldian prerogatives, there is no neutrality in knowledge. Therefore, it is understood as a constitutive part of a politically well-articulated device with economic precepts, as Machado (2012) argues that genealogy questions precisely

the formation of domains of knowledge from disciplinary practices and policies. On this aspect, Foucault (2010, p. 6) argues that what is at stake in the genealogical period is the analysis of the so-called "normative matrices of behavior," aiming to analyze power and its manifestations, and the constitution of subjects immersed in the techniques and procedures of relations of knowledge and power.

Notes on biopower and neoliberal governmentality in the NHS

Foucault, in "*The Birth of Biopolitics*," points out that the relationship between economy and power is demonstrated primarily through economic theories, liberalism and its mutation, neoliberalism, and how they can be understood as the *raison d'être* of biopolitics. According to Foucault (2008a), it is through economic growth and its perpetuation throughout history that biopolitics operates. In this perspective, Castro (2015, p. 86, our translation) emphasizes that the guiding notion for Foucault's study is that biopolitics, to be understood, also requires an understanding of the general political context and rationality of liberalism, "[...] because liberalism is not reduced to being an economic theory, but is primarily a political-anthropological conception."

In this regard, it is worth noting that at its genesis, liberalism advocates freedom as a natural right, applicable to economics, trade, private property, and the market, in contrast to totalitarian domination by the State (Dardot; Laval, 2016). From a political standpoint, according to Foucault (2008b, p. 28), liberalism produces traces of governmentality through a "new type of rationality," imposing on the art of governance "[...] a new calculation that consists in saying and making the government say." It is to this rationality, "constituted by the determination of forms of self-limitation in the exercise of state power" (Castro, 2015, p. 86, our translation), that Foucault refers as liberalism.

In broad terms, it is observed that:

The classical liberals of the 18th century had found in the market the mechanism that allowed them to establish when governing was excessive, that is, correct or incorrect. For this reason, they had placed the State under the guardianship of the market (Castro, 2015, p. 86, our translation).

In this aspect, it is possible to understand that "[...] the fundamental concern of liberalism is to establish non-state forms of governmentality over man" (Castro, 2015, p. 85, our translation). Thus, although at first glance, liberalism appears as an apparent escape from state power, Foucault (2008a, p. 40, our translation) draws attention to the fact that this new

rationality imprinted on the art of governing operates not as an inhibitor of state forces, but as a "[...] principle for its maintenance, for its more complete development, for its perfection."

It follows from this that the idea of freedom envisaged by liberalism seems to conceal an interest focused on surveillance, on the "limitation of the exercise of state power from the very practice of government. [...] The era of liberalism is not the era of freedom, but of security" (Castro, 2015, p. 86, our translation). In this way, liberalism delimited the function of the State, which would consist not of guaranteeing life but "[...] the security of those natural phenomena that are economic processes or intrinsic processes of the population" (Foucault, 2008b, p. 474, our translation). Thus, the market influences operating on the State and framing its conditions of action, and the techniques of governmentality to be used configure them as power relations aimed at serving economic interests.

Foucault (2008b) then focuses on analyzing the art of governing and the economic processes driven by liberalism and its modifications, namely neoliberalism. Regarding the updating of the capitalist system through the neoliberal regime, there is the production of power relations through a new conception of governmentality, as Han (2018, p. 40, our translation) notes, "neoliberalism [...] is not primarily concerned with the biological, the somatic, the corporeal. Instead, it discovers the psyche as a productive force." Thus, the new regime acts not only on the control of bodies but on the psyche of subjects through a psychopolitics that uses emotions as productive resources.

Thus, the incorporation of psychopolitics into neoliberalism is observed through a series of directives that gather the competencies and skills inherent to its project of a neoliberal subject, namely: "[...] motivation, project, competition, optimization, and initiative are inherent to the psychopolitical technique of domination in the neoliberal regime" (Han, 2018, p. 31, our translation).

In the same perspective, in his analysis of neoliberalism, Foucault already pointed out the notion that aligning governmentality with economic precepts aims to create a new process of subjectivation where it is no longer the market but the enterprise that becomes a device of power relations and dictates modes of action, knowledge, truths, governance techniques, and even the limits of subjects (Castro, 2015).

The art of governing, guided by neoliberalism, brings forth a new conception of society, which is not "[...] a society of the supermarket - an entrepreneurial society. The homo economicus that is to be reconstructed is not the man of exchange, not the consumer man; it is the man of the enterprise and production" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 201, our translation).

According to Foucault (2008a), corporate governance, from a neoliberal perspective, constitutes a social fabric whose unitary basis is precisely the format of an enterprise. In this framework, the entire social sphere is scrutinized through micro-managements ranging from an individual household to the management of small communities, families, and neighborhoods.

It is this multiplication of the 'enterprise' form within the social body that constitutes, in my view, the scope of neoliberal politics. It is about making the market, competition, and consequently, the enterprise what we can call the shaping power of society (Foucault, 2008a, p. 203, our translation).

The corporate logic established in the social body attributes to the contemporary subject the characteristics of an entrepreneur who, by managing oneself and driven by entrepreneurial spirit, self-exploits (Han, 2018). Therefore, unlike liberalism, "[...] the problem of neoliberalism is how to regulate the global exercise of political power based on the principles of a market economy" (Foucault, 2008a, p. 181, our translation).

With this intent, the neoliberal regime begins to permeate different spheres of society, including education. Thus, the entrepreneurialism characteristic of neoliberalism starts to shape the field of education, imprinting a market logic onto this sector. Taking the implementation of the NEM as an example, one can observe the emergence of discourses that rely on neoliberal rationality in this stage of youth education.

One of the mottos to be highlighted is the exaltation of the notion of freedom of choice. According to Han (2018), there is a crisis in the conception of freedom in contemporary times. It seems that the idea of freedom emerging in the New Educational Management (NEM) constitutes itself as a statement within the same discursive regime, that is, as an object of the same discursiveness, whose associated domain implies the adoption of ideas aimed at flexibility life, abandoning/withdrawing the State from the regulation of social practices, and closely resembling statements that reverberated in the educational field, such as: "The university should actually be for the few, in the sense of being useful to society."¹

The statement by the then Minister of Education, Milton Ribeiro, in 2021, suggests a lack of interest in making the university accessible to all, as well as emphasizes the creation of a project aimed at devaluing university knowledge. According to the minister, the protagonists of the future will be the Federal Institutes, as they are capable of training technicians, making universities less useful to society. In this regard, he highlights: "I have a lot of engineers or

¹ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2021/08/10/ministro-da-educacao-defende-que-universidade-seja-para-poucos.ghtml>. Accessed on: 10 September. 2023.

lawyers driving Uber because they can't find proper placement. If they were IT technicians, they would find employment because there is a high demand" (G1, 2021, our translation). One can observe a strategy in the minister's statement to encourage young people to become interested in technical education and prioritize vocational training over university education.

If we conjecture alongside Han's (2018) understanding, we will soon see that the neoliberal regime uses the dissemination of the idea of freedom to propagate the conception that the individual, "[...] as a project that freely sketches itself, is capable of unlimited production" (Han, 2018, p. 15, our translation). Thus, the exaltation of freedom is also a new way to keep the individual submissive to the system, since by believing that they are entirely free to design their future and make choices for their education, young individuals may not question, for example, that their power of choice in the NEM is limited to a menu of disciplines that is predefined.

Continuing on this aspect, Dardot and Laval (2016, our translation) point out that:

[...] neoliberal governmentality relies on a global normative framework which, in the name of freedom and leveraging the leeway granted to individuals, directs anew the conduct, choices, and practices of these individuals (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 20, our translation).

The subtle maneuvers of neoliberalism guide behaviors so that individuals' choices align with its prescriptions. According to Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 20, our translation), this is made possible because "[...] neoliberalism employs novel techniques of power over conduct and subjectivities," which also extend to the new understanding of work and the employed worker in this regime, developed through the encouragement of entrepreneurship, competition, flexibilization, and production, placing the individual as responsible for their success or failure in the market.

Dardot and Laval (2016) argue that this context makes "[...] life a perpetual management of risks that demands rigorous abstention from dangerous practices, constant self-control, and regulation of one's behaviors, mixing asceticism and flexibility" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 213, our translation). Thus, neoliberalism also operates on the subjective plane, and "[...] what is at stake is nothing less than the form of our existence, that is, the way we are led to behave, to relate to others and ourselves" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 16, our translation).

Furthermore, the pursuit of conformity to current standards requires professionals to prepare for performing multiple tasks. To achieve this, it is necessary to develop socio-

emotional skills and competencies valued by the market, enabling professionals to ensure a suitable profile for employment.

Thus, a general understanding can be formulated that biopower and neoliberal governmentality are found in the New High School (NEM) as catalysts for disseminating discourses on work from a neoliberal perspective. This intensifies when young people are attributed full responsibility for constructing their lives, disregarding the social and historical conditions influencing this process.

In this context, we will lead the discussions in the next section, aiming to understand the discourses related to Labor Reform (RT) and its connection to the neoliberal regime. We will consider factors contributing to the contemporary understanding of work from a neoliberal perspective, explore the interaction between work and education in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and delve into the world of work within the context of the New High School.

Methodological Procedures

Regarding methodological aspects, the research is characterized as qualitative, since the analysis of the study object occurs without considering quantitative data (Prodanov; Freitas, 2018). Among the various qualitative approaches available, a descriptive-interpretative perspective was adopted for this study (Bogdan; Biklen, 2010). This analytical procedure involves the description and interpretation of a corpus using the Foucauldian archaeo-genealogical method, which examines discourse as an event within power and knowledge games (Navarro, 2020). This study focuses on the description and interpretation of discursive positions on Labor Reform (RT) in the Humanities and Applied Social Sciences textbooks of the New High School (NEM), aiming to understand the possible relationship between the emergence of these discourses in primary education and the dissemination of neoliberal ideals.

With the research framework established, data collection was conducted as follows: a) consultation of the PNLD 2021 Guide for Humanities and Applied Social Sciences to identify approved books on the theme of labor; b) downloading ten textbooks from the respective publishers' websites; c) random selection of five textbooks, namely: *Diálogos: Importância do trabalho*, by Cláudio Vicentino; Eduardo Campos; Eustáquio de Sene, *Editora Ática*; *Humanitas - Política e mundo do trabalho*, by Ronaldo Vainfas; Sheila de Castro Faria; Jorge Ferreira, *Editora Saraiva*; *Módulos para o Novo Ensino Médio – Ética, política e trabalho*, by Roberto Catelli Júnior *et al.*, *Editora AJS*; *Conexão mundo – Trabalho e sociedade*, by Leandro

Gomes *et al.*, Editora do Brasil; *Identidade em ação – Trabalho e tecnologia*, de Leandro Karnal *et al.*, Editora Moderna. After selecting the materials, a second reading was conducted to identify statements contributing to the understanding and development of the proposed theme.

Analysis of Discourses on Labor Reform in Didactic Collections of the New High School

Building on the preceding discussions, certain statements on Labor Reform (RT) are observed in didactic materials, aiming to trace how these discourses are constructed. This involves investigating how these discourses may function as mechanisms for governing the lives of young people in the New High School (NEM), influenced by neoliberalism. In this regard, let us analyze:

Law No. 13,467/2017 brought about several changes, starting with the workday, which can now extend up to 12 hours, provided that the weekly limit of 44 hours is respected. The lunch or rest break every 6 hours of work can be reduced to 30 minutes. Additionally, vacations can be split into three periods, and the union dues became optional. [...] Other forms of work were introduced: intermittent work, where individuals are paid per hour worked, which means there may be unpaid intervals between shifts; part-time work, up to 30 hours per week; and home office. The time bank for overtime must be compensated within six months instead of the previous year (Vainfas; Farias; Ferreira, 2020 p, 125, our translation).

[...] The transformations in labor legislation in recent years have undermined many of these rights – not without strong resistance from organized labor movements, unions, and political parties. Advocates argue that these changes are necessary to adapt to the reality and competitiveness of the current economy and serve to preserve jobs. For instance, the recent labor reform in the country (Law No. 13,467, 2017) introduced intermittent work (Vicentino; Campos; Sene, 2020, p. 134, our translation).

Among the main transformations brought by the set of legal changes known as the Labor Reform, approved in 2017, a highlight was the implementation of mechanisms that tend to favor individual negotiations between each worker and their employer, to define aspects related to remuneration and employment regime, as well as the terms of potential dismissal, with the possibility of restricting access to rights previously guaranteed by the CLT, such as unemployment benefits [...] (Catelli Júnior *et al.*, 2020, p. 123, our translation).

The first statement to be analyzed is found in the collection *Humanitas - Política e mundo do trabalho*² and contributes to discussions on workers and productive restructuring and

² Humanitas - Politics and the World of Work.

the 2017 Labor Reform. It informs the reader about the changes resulting from the Labor Reform, such as vacation splitting, home office work, and lunch breaks or rest, for example. These changes are presented as choices available to the worker, directing the understanding that they are benefits the worker may choose, rather than norms or impositions.

The second statement is located in the subsection *O problema do desemprego*³ and contributes to discussions within Chapter 4 - *Trabalho no mundo globalizado*⁴, in the collection *Diálogos – Importância do trabalho*⁵. The subject's position provides elucidations that reflect the perspective of those who advocate reform as a solution to modernize and adapt the labor sector to current economic standards governed by competitiveness. As presented in the collection, the transformations in labor legislation end up curtailing workers' rights, while also informing students that these changes did not occur without resistance from movements within the labor class.

The third highlighted statement is part of the topic *Desregulamentação e os direitos trabalhistas*⁶, from the collection *Módulos para o Novo Ensino Médio – Ética, política e trabalho*⁷. In it, the changes brought by the Labor Reform (RT) are emphasized through the observation of new forms of negotiations between employer and employee, which now occur directly under the pretext of providing greater legal security and reducing costs.

The materials bring discursive markers related to neoliberal governmentality, as theorized by Foucault (2008a), which focuses on Labor Reform as a panorama of insecurity and vulnerability regarding working conditions and income. With the increase in unemployment, which, according to Antunes (2020), is structural in this regime, many Brazilians seek informal sector employment as an alternative to entering the labor market, an area that generally does not guarantee rights.

Turning our focus more deeply to the collection *Humanitas - Política e mundo do trabalho*⁸, let's analyze the opening image of the section discussing the Labor Reform (Figure 1).

³ The Problem of Unemployment.

⁴ Work in the Globalized World.

⁵ Dialogues – Importance of Work.

⁶ Deregulation and Labor Rights.

⁷ Modules for the New High School – Ethics, Politics, and Work.

⁸ Humanitas - Politics and the World of Work.

Figure 1 – Printscreen from the didactic collection *Humanitas - Politics and the World of Work*⁹



Source: Vainfas, Farias, and Ferreira (2020).

The verbo-visual statement consists of a cartoon by artist Alves, published in 2017. It portrays the need for the worker to adapt to the dynamics of capital and the employer in order to enter the job market; this is what the phrase "Whoever wants the job will have to get out of there" marks in this discourse. The employer, standing tall, and the workers, in a submissive position with frightened facial expressions, recall a certain memory domain (Foucault, 2004a), referring to the idea of work as servitude, as well as the reference to the Consolidation of Labor Laws (CLT) as something that could protect workers, but in the statement, appears as a divergent element from employability conditions, a kind of obstacle to securing a position.

Attending to these discursive elements, it is possible to problematize the existence of an "adaptation policy," as proposed by Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 90), when they state, "[...] in an economy constantly in motion, adaptation is an ongoing task to recreate harmony between how the individual lives and thinks and the economic conditions to which they must submit." In other words, while the materiality portrays the increase in informality of work, it also leaves traces that allow reflection on the imperative of the worker's adaptation to this new situation, mainly because the image is accompanied by statements that aim to mitigate the damages of the Labor Reform (RT) by indicating that "[...] the precarization of work and the loss of social rights are not limited to Brazilian society. They occur practically everywhere in the world" (Vainfas; Farias; Ferreira, 2020, p. 16, our translation).

⁹ Translation of the cartoon: Whoever wants the job will have to leave there.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to add that following this explanation of work precariousness as a global issue and not restricted to the Brazilian scenario, the collection guides the discussion on the topic:

It is necessary to understand the processes of gaining and losing rights that workers have gone through, who, in the early days of capitalism, had no labor rights, fought to achieve them, obtained these rights, and in contemporary times, have lost many of them. [...] The history of labor in Brazil shows that, as in other countries, social and labor rights are gained, benefiting workers. But they can also be lost, harming them (Vainfas; Farias; Ferreira, 2020, p. 142, our translation).

In the statements, the subject's position highlights to the young people of the New High School (NEM) that the processes of labor regulation, including both the achievements and losses of social and labor rights, evolve throughout history in response to changes in society. These formulations can serve as a mechanism to disseminate a discourse that normalizes the impacts of the Labor Reform (RT), especially by equating the situation in Brazil with that of other countries, as a simple consequence of globalization.

These discursive formations, aligned with the competitive demands of the market, not only emphasize the importance of workers staying updated but also contribute to shaping competitive subjects in the face of commercial market instability. Therefore, individuals bear the responsibility for their successes or failures. It is within this context that we will analyze the next materiality (Figure 02).

Figure 02 – Screenshot from the didactic collection Dialogues - The Importance of Work



A flexibilização das leis trabalhistas e a maior competitividade do mercado de trabalho geraram um discurso da necessidade da “reciclagem” do trabalhador.

Source: Vainfas, Farias, and Ferreira (2020).

The stance adopted in the verbo-visual materiality (Figure 02) emphasizes that the flexibilization of labor laws and the transformations impacting the world of work and productivity are grounded in neoliberal rationality. This is evidenced by the provoked effects of meaning, which outline the formation of the worker subject demanding constant updating, as illustrated in the image (Figure 02).

According to Dardot and Laval, "this norm imposes on each of us to live in a universe of generalized competition, urges wage earners and populations to engage in economic struggle against each other [...]" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 16, our translation). Furthermore, we observe the absence of a deeper problematization regarding the discussion raised about worker retraining and the configuration of the work permit as an element that no longer serves the new work context. This situation opens the door to the acceptance of the discourse of the need to adapt to informality and precarization as the only possible alternative for those seeking a position in the labor market. Contrary to these issues, the proposed exercise seeks only the interpretation of the cartoon and gathering the student's opinion on the subject.

Further on, the student is directed to another activity that addresses the same context, but now the questions are directed toward their life project and the perspectives of young people facing market updates: "In what way do you see yourself in this future that is soon to come? Dedicate yourself exclusively to a job, to a career, or seek to reconcile both?" (Vicentino; Campos; Sene, 2020, p. 143, our translation).

These questions aim to awaken in young subjects a reflection on how they perceive themselves in this imminent future of globalization, new forms of productivity, and competitiveness in the world of work. Moreover, they direct the young person to consider whether, in this context, they will opt for a career, that is, stability, something more formal, or if they will dedicate themselves to work. The statement suggests that there is a world of possibilities for young people, in which they may even reconcile work, career, and study, for example. In this aspect, the activity aligns with neoliberal models to "[...] justify increasingly profound inequalities" that lead the individual "[...] to behave like a company" (Dardot; Laval, 2016, p. 16, our translation).

The following statements were highlighted from the collection *Identidade em ação – Trabalho e tecnologia*¹⁰ and are located in the section titled *Diverse Perspectives*, which aims to discuss changes in the world of work and in the legislation regulating labor relations through two texts presenting different viewpoints on the subject.

¹⁰ Identity in Action – Work and Technology.

Text 1: Challenges for the future regulation of work - "The International Labour Organization invites us to reflect on the challenges for future labor regulation – regardless of the conjunctural issues surrounding labor reform in Brazil – proposing as its theme the raising of issues that are currently not well addressed in the normative framework. [...] Firstly, it is necessary to clarify some assumptions of legal regulation. Then, current challenges at the interface between law and productive organization will be addressed, such as those brought by transitions in forms of work, resulting in efforts to update labor regulations, expanding discussions beyond the classical Fordist model and national boundaries, yet without losing sight of some of the main functions of labor law, reducing inequalities and controlling economic power. In discussing adequate regulation for labor law, it is crucial to highlight the complex manner in which it interacts with labor practices and power relations among involved actors. Contrary to what is often propagated, the field of law is not exempt from the influence of power relations and the imbalance of social and economic agents, posing a challenge in establishing appropriate regulations. [...] Continuing to map unresolved issues regarding the employment relationship, four points stand out. The first point encompasses the transformation of productive fabric and the reorganization of productive capital. Many consequences of productive restructuring have not been addressed in law, as concepts of company and employer increasingly diverge from these actors' actual configurations, demanding a new stance not limited to traditional and restrictive interpretations." (Coutinho, S G. Challenges for regulation: issues not well addressed in the legal framework. In: ILO. Future of Work in Brazil: perspectives and tripartite dialogues. Geneva: ILO, 2018, our translation).

Text 2: Modernization of labor relations - "In 2017, the approval of laws 13,429/17 (outsourcing) and 13,467/17 (labor reform) promoted the modernization of key points in labor laws, adapting them to more modern production models and providing more flexibility in labor relations, which was desired by both companies and workers. Now, it is necessary to ensure the effectiveness of the approved laws. It is important to act to inform society about the importance of the new legislation and to seek the best possible application of these laws. It is also necessary for the country to continue modernizing labor relations. There are still gaps in the legislation that leave room for interpretation and create legal uncertainty, and there is excessive bureaucracy that needs to be eliminated to reduce costs and improve the efficiency of companies and the state. Brazil is one of the countries with the highest number of labor lawsuits. Excessive judicialization is exacerbated by a slow and expensive system, which generates costs and uncertainties. It is expected that changes in labor legislation will strengthen collective bargaining that can, through dialogue, adjust working conditions between companies and workers in a way that benefits both. It is also important to advance in promoting alternatives for conflict resolution and reducing judicialization. A competitive and global industry demands updated, streamlined, flexible labor relations with greater freedom of negotiation between workers and employers." (CNI. Modernization of labor relations. In: CNI. Strategic Map of Industry 2018-2022. Brasília: CNI, 2018, our translation).

We highlight the section, Diverse Perspectives, for providing elucidations on changes in the world of work, which broaden and deepen the discussions developed throughout the chapter, aiming to provide young people with reflections and conditions to critically position themselves on the topics addressed, in this case, on labor reform. We will start with the materiality comprising Text 1– *Desafios para a regulamentação do trabalho no futuro*¹¹ which presents some challenges involving the legal regulation of work in Brazil. The statement highlights the divergences between social and economic agents and issues of labor law. In general, the setbacks pointed out by the text refer to the attempt to deconstruct wage labor, the difficulties of the law to act in the face of the flexibilization of labor relations, as well as commenting on the processes of fragmentation that accompany new modes of productive organization (Karnal *et al.*, 2020).

However, it is noteworthy that the text reinforces early on that these are challenging issues to be considered "regardless of the conjunctural issues surrounding labor reform in Brazil," anticipating for the reader, moreover, that it is a proposition of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and that it refers to "issues that are currently not well addressed in the normative framework" of labor in the global scenario (Karnal *et al.*, 2020, p. 124). Therefore, it is possible to conjecture that there is an entire construction of meanings in highlighting that these impasses are not just a problem of Brazil and, apparently, were not caused by the approval of labor reform, although they may have been intensified by it.

Text 2 – *Modernização das relações trabalhistas*¹², presents the RT propositions from a perspective of modernity. The use of the term 'modernization' alone attributes to the reform a sense of advancement, improvement, and progress. The text further emphasizes this issue by highlighting that, without the reform, there is an "excess of judicialization" in labor relations, and the new formulations will facilitate contentious points, such as the conflicts that often occur in negotiations between employers and workers, through dialogue (Karnal *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the text emphasizes the urgent need to ensure the effectiveness of the approved laws so that the country can progress in labor relations and benefit from all the gains in productivity and competitiveness that changes in labor laws can generate (Karnal *et al.*, 2020).

Regarding negotiations between workers and employers, we note that there is a much broader debate than that presented in Text 2, as far as workers are concerned. Collective negotiations can raise risks and further inequalities, given that these individuals are exposed to

¹¹ Challenges for the regulation of work in the future.

¹² Modernization of labor relations.

"various forms of contracting, especially with the expansion of outsourcing and subcontracting" (Karnal *et al.*, 2020, p. 124). Bill No. 4,330, presented to the Chamber of Deputies in 2004 and approved in 2015¹³, proposes the provision of service contracts and the employment relationships arising from it. In general terms, the proposal suggests that outsourced workers no longer need to be represented by their category unions. The rationale is that direct dialogue between companies and workers will promote negotiation and, consequently, benefit both parties.

This same issue also appears in the collection *Módulos para o Novo Ensino Médio – Ética, política e trabalho*¹⁴. In it, we find discussions similar to those presented so far, bringing opposing and favorable positions on outsourcing in the activity entitled Point of View. The opposing viewpoint argues that outsourcing worsens work in various aspects, both in terms of working conditions, low wages and scarcity of benefits, and even systematic loss of rights, showing that "[...] formal employment with a signed work card is no guarantee of 'decent' non-precarious work" (Catelli Júnior *et al.*, 2020, p. 126, our translation). Conversely, the favorable position points out that discussing outsourcing is necessary because it does not undermine labor rights; on the contrary, it advocates that "labor rights will remain intact, but employees will be linked to another company, the specialized service provider" (Catelli Júnior *et al.*, 2020, p. 126). Statements discussing this theme can also be found in the collection *Conexão mundo – Trabalho e sociedade*¹⁵ as detailed below (Figure 03).

¹³ See more at: <https://g1.globo.com/concursos-e-emprego/noticia/2015/04/entenda-o-projeto-de-lei-da-terceirizacao-que-sera-votado.html>. Accessed in: 03 Feb. 2024.

¹⁴ Modules for the New High School – Ethics, Politics, and Work.

¹⁵ Connection World – Work and Society.

Figure 03 - Printscreen from the didactic collection Connection World – Work and Society



Source: Gomes *et al.* (2020).

It is interesting to note that on the threshold of the activities presented in the materials, there is a recurrence of discussions on the configurations of labor relations (RT), specifically on outsourcing and the conditions of workers. In this context, even though initially the highlighted statements present positions that suggest dispersion and discontinuity in discourses, they nonetheless have a "formation and organization of the enunciative field in which they appear and circulate" (Foucault, 2004a, p. 62, our translation). Both viewpoints against and in favor of labor reform can be correlated and can elicit "[...] deductions, definitions, whose sequence characterizes the architecture of a text" (Foucault, 2004a, p. 63, our translation), and the formation of a concept about labor relations.

Power relations only occur in relation to free subjects (Foucault, 2004b). The notion that the worker will no longer need to resort to unions and can individually negotiate with the employer expresses a disciplinary power (Foucault, 2004b), which operates on the needs of the working subjects. Given the relationship between power and freedom, Foucault (2004b) conceives resistance as an inseparable element alongside these.

In this respect, Revel (2005) anticipates that

Resistance necessarily occurs where there is power, because it is inseparable from power relations. Thus, resistance both grounds power relations and, at times, is the result of these relations; as power relations are everywhere, resistance is the possibility of creating spaces for struggles and enabling possibilities for transformation everywhere (Revel, 2005, p. 74, our translation).

The statements found in the collections aim to construct a specific model of subjectivation: that of the entrepreneurial subject, oriented by the market and competition, which imposes exclusion as punishment for those who do not comply with these norms. It is observed that neoliberal governmentality uses normative instruments to regulate and shape subjects according to their interests. However, the textbooks analyzed also adopt strategies of resistance to this governmentality, and the material represented in Figure 03 can be seen as an example of this, using humor to reveal how labor negotiations would be in an environment of extensive outsourcing.

According to Marinho (2020, p. 123, our translation), “Anti-authoritarian resistance struggles are plural; immediate; transversal; aim at the effect of power; question the status of the individual; oppose the effects of power related to knowledge; are contemporary and ask who we are.” In this sense, it is feasible, using the Foucauldian framework, to seek to understand forms of resistance as a response to the power relations established by neoliberal governmentality (Foucault, 2013) and to explore the conception of a subject that differs from the entrepreneurial, competitive, and individualistic model, challenging “everything that separates the individual, that breaks his relationship with others, fragments communal life, forces the individual to turn inward, and connects him to his own identity in a coercive manner” (Foucault, 2013, p. 277, our translation).

Final considerations

As observed throughout the article, the accelerated debate towards the implementation of the proposed reforms for the labor scenario is strengthened by the construction of a discourse that presents Labor Reform (RT) as the only perspective for improving the sector. It is expected that the new arrangements, based on flexibilization, will modernize the economy and make the market more competitive and aligned with global demands.

In this context, this study aimed to analyze discursive positions on labor reform present in high school textbooks approved by the National Program for Textbooks and Educational Materials (PNLD), 2021 edition. The analyses focused on discursive debates surrounding the Labor Reform, considering that the inclusion of the topic of work in the high school curriculum occurs under conditions and circumstances similar to the approval of the Labor Reform.

In the analyzed collections, discursive positions reinforce the changes and outline a scenario of insecurity, deregulation, and vulnerability for workers. Flexibilization, a prominent

characteristic of the labor reform often propagated by its supporters, benefits employers more than job-seeking workers. This flexibility allows employers to adjust schedules and hiring modalities, enhancing competitiveness and profitability through more agile services. Consequently, the growth of outsourced services is imminent, where worker stability is compromised. Furthermore, according to the analyses, the employability resulting from the reform tends to precarious labor, increasing productivity at the cost of workers' safety and protection.

Within the framework of discursive regularities, arguments emphasizing the divergences between the Labor Reform and rights guaranteed by the CLT stand out, viewed as obstacles to employability in a competitive market due to the costs associated with workers' legal security. The reform is presented as a modernization of labor laws, suggesting that the traditional model of formal employment is outdated. In contrast, young people are encouraged to prepare themselves to become entrepreneurs, service providers, outsourced workers, and competitive, entrepreneurial figures capable of dealing with market instability.

These discourses found in high school educational materials reflect a neoliberal rationality that influences the development of governmentality regulating the time, body, and subjectivity of young people. The analysis of discursive regularities in textbooks reveals a constant attempt to prepare young people to meet the requirements of a neoliberal subject, an entrepreneurial subject that constantly manages their competencies and skills under the risk of sanctions if they do not meet the required standards.

The role of the teacher is crucial in this context, as they can act on educational materials to promote debates that stimulate critical analysis and questioning of the discourses present in the textbooks and the reality experienced by students. However, the discursive series on reform present in the analyzed collections resemble the emergence of neoliberal discourses, which have also influenced reforms and adjustments in the Brazilian primary education curriculum. Therefore, it is essential for more research to be conducted to understand and problematize these aspects.

REFERENCES

- ANTUNES, R. **O privilégio da Servidão**: o novo proletariado de serviços na era digital. 2. ed. São Paulo, Boitempo, 2020.
- BOGDAN, R. C.; BIKLEN, S. K. **Investigação qualitativa em educação**: uma introdução à teoria e aos métodos. Porto: Porto Editora, 2010.
- BRASIL. Ministério da Educação. **Base nacional Comum Curricular**: Ensino Médio. Brasília, DF: MEC, 2018.
- BRASIL. Ministério da Educação. **Guia Digital do PNLD 2021**. Projeto de vida. Brasília, DF: Ministério da Educação, 2021. Available at: https://pnld.nees.ufal.br/pnld_2021_proj_int_vida/componente-curricular/pnld2021-didatico-projeto-de-vida. Accessed in: 20 Sept. 2022.
- CASTRO, E. **Introdução a Foucault**. Tradução: Beatriz de Almeida Magalhães. 1. ed. Belo Horizonte: Autêntica editora, 2015.
- CATELLI JÚNIOR, R.; LA SALVIA, A.; SERAFIN, A. P. G.; ESCOURA, M.; SILVA, P. T.; ROCHA, R. **Módulos para o Novo Ensino Médio**: Ética, política e trabalho. São Paulo: AJS, 2020.
- DARDOT, P.; LAVAL, C. **A nova razão do mundo**: ensaios sobre a sociedade neoliberal. Tradução: Mariana Echalar. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2016.
- FOUCAULT, M. **A arqueologia do saber**. Tradução: Luiz Felipe Baeta Neves. 7. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Forense Universitária, 2004a.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Microfísica do poder**. Organização e tradução de Roberto Machado. 8. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2004b.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Nascimento da biopolítica**: Curso dado no College de France (1978-1979). Tradução: Eduardo Brandão. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2008a.
- FOUCAULT, M. **Segurança, território, população**: curso dado no Còllege de France (1977-1978). Tradução: Eduardo Brandão. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2008b.
- FOUCAULT, M. **O governo de si e dos outros**: Curso no Collège de France (1982-1983). Tradução de: Eduardo Brandão. São Paulo: Ed. WMF Martins Fontes, 2010.
- G1. **Ministro da Educação defende que universidade seja 'para poucos'**. [S. l.], 10 ago. 2021. Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/educacao/noticia/2021/08/10/ministro-da-educacao-defende-que-universidade-seja-para-poucos.ghtml>. Accessed in: 10 Mar. 2024.
- GOMES, S.; MARPICA, N. S.; MANFRINATI, P.; SILVA, S. M. **Conexão Mundo**: Trabalho e sociedade. São Paulo: Editora do Brasil, 2020.

HAN, B.-C. **Psicopolítica**: o neoliberalismo e as novas técnicas de poder. Tradução: Maurício Liesen. Preparação: Ligia Azevedo. Revisão: Ana Martini e Fernanda Alvares. 1. ed. Belo Horizonte: Editora Áyiné. 2018.

KARNAL, L.; FERNANDES, L. E. O.; BACKX, I.; VIEIRA, F. P. G.; ABREU, M.; MARTINI, A.; DEL GAUDIO, E. F. R. S.; COSTA, C. **Identidade em ação**: trabalho e tecnologia. São Paulo: Moderna, 2020.

MACHADO, R. **Foucault, a ciência e o saber**. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar, 2012.

MARINHO, C. Novas relações de poder e novas resistências: corpos em aliança como resistência à precariedade neoliberal. *In*: MARTINS, A. C. A.; VERAS, E. F. (org.). **Corpos em aliança**: diálogos interdisciplinares sobre gênero, raça e sexualidade. 1. ed. Curitiba, Appris, 2020.

NAVARRO, P. Estudos discursivos foucaultianos: questões de método para análise de discursos, **Moara**, Belém, v. 1, n. 57, p. 8-33, 2020.

PRODANOV, C. C.; FREITAS, E. C. de. **Metodologia do trabalho científico**: métodos e técnicas da pesquisa e do trabalho acadêmico. 2. ed. Novo Hamburgo: Feevale, 2018.

REVEL, J. **Michel Foucault**: conceitos essenciais. Tradução: Maria do Rosário Gregolin, Nilton Milanez e Carlos Piovesani. São Carlos, SP: Claraluz, 2005.

VAINFAS, R; FARIA, S. C; FERREIRA, J. **Humanitas**: política e mundo do trabalho. São Paulo: Saraiva, 2020.

VICENTINO, C.; CAMPOS, E.; SENE, E. **Diálogos**: Importância do trabalho. São Paulo: Ática, 2020.

About the Authors

Élida Karla Alves de BRITO

Escola Estadual Rafael Godeiro, Rafael Godeiro – RN – Brasil. Master's in Education from the Graduate Program in Education (POSENSINO).

Francisco Vieira da SILVA

Federal Rural University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA), Caraúbas – RN – Brazil. Faculty member at the Federal Rural University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA), Caraúbas Campus. Permanent Professor in the Graduate Program in Literature (PPGL) at the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN), and in the Graduate Program in Education (POSENSINO), a collaboration between the State University of Rio Grande do Norte (UERN), the Federal Institute of Education, Science and Technology of Rio Grande do Norte (IFRN), and the Federal Rural University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA).

CRediT Author Statement

Acknowledgements: Not applicable.

Funding: The translation of the text was funded by the Call for Proposals for the Publication of Scientific Articles, from the Federal Rural University of Semi-Arid (UFERSA).

Conflicts of interest: There are no conflicts of interest.

Ethical approval: Not applicable.

Data and material availability: The material can be found on the publishers' website.

Author's contributions: **Élida Karla Alves da Costa** – conception of the article and development of the study's methodological design, writing of the text and construction of the analyses; **Francisco Vieira da Silva** – text supervision, literature review, writing of the conclusion, and manuscript revision.

Processing and editing: Editora Ibero-Americana de Educação.
Proofreading, formatting, normalization and translation.

