

Pedagogies of precariousness in the neoliberal educational order. Insecurity and recomposition of possibilities in the current political-pedagogical context

Pedagogías de la precariedad en el orden educativo neoliberal. Inseguridad y recomposición de las posibilidades en el actual contexto político-pedagógico

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Abstract: The aim of this article is to analyse how neoliberal principles in education create a state of precariousness. The question that will guide the problematisation and the argumentation of the work is: What is the «status» of precariousness in the current order and how does it manifest itself - expressly or inadvertently - in the contemporary educational field? In order to address this question, a theoretical-analytical exercise has been carried out based on a review of relevant

literature on the relationship between neoliberalisation and education. As a central hypothesis, we propose that the processes of precarisation constitute an objective necessity for the expansion and reproduction of the new neoliberal order. In addition, this order requires the production of a specific type of subjectivity that normalizes «precariousness» as a new historical condition, producing a particular notion of subjectivity and agency. The intersection between objective needs and the production of a particular subjectivity is produced in the cultural space through «pedagogies of precariousness». The installation of such pedagogies in formal education systems will be verified through the analysis of three predominant figures: the entrepreneur, the apprentice of competences and the teacher as technician. Finally, it is analysed how a «pedagogy of possibilities» could be opposed to «pedagogies of precariousness», enabling other forms of educational relations and new political-pedagogical horizons.

Keywords: Neoliberalism; precariousness; education; critical literacy; agency.

Resumen: El objetivo de este artículo es analizar las modalidades de penetración de los principios neoliberales en la educación desde una dimensión específica: la de la precariedad. La pregunta que guiará la problematización y la trama argumental del trabajo es: ¿Cuál es el «estatus» de la precariedad en el orden actual y bajo qué figuras se manifiesta -expresa o inadvertidamente- en el campo educativo contemporáneo? Para afrontar esta interrogante se ha llevado a cabo un ejercicio teórico-analítico en base a la revisión de literatura relevante sobre las relaciones entre neoliberalización y educación. Como hipótesis central proponemos que los procesos de precarización constituyen una necesidad objetiva para la expansión y reproducción del nuevo orden neoliberal. Seguidamente, que dicho orden requiere la producción de un tipo específico de subjetividad que naturalice la «precariedad» como nueva condición histórica de los sujetos. La intersección entre las necesidades objetivas y la producción de una subjetividad particular se produce en el espacio cultural a través de unas «pedagogías de la precariedad». La instalación de dichas pedagogías en los sistemas educativos formales será verificada a partir del análisis de tres figuras predominantes: el emprendedor, el aprendiz de competencias y el profesor como técnico. Finalmente, se analiza cómo una «pedagogía de las posibilidades» podría contraponerse a las «pedagogías de la precariedad», habilitando otras formas de relaciones educativas y nuevos horizontes político-pedagógicos.

Palabras claves: Neoliberalismo; precariedad; educación; alfabetización crítica; agencia.

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1. Introducción

In a context of post-pandemic social transformation, and in the midst of a crisis of meaning around the school and its social role (Rivera-Vargas, et al., 2021), it is important to analyse the intrusion of neoliberal principles in education from the perspective a particular notion of precarity. The question that will guide the problematisation and the argumentative plot of this paper is: What is the «status» of precariousness in the current order and under what figures does it manifest itself -implicitly or inadvertently- in the contemporary educational field?

In this regard, we argue that, in its current phase, the expansion of the system of production and exploitation involves the precarisation of an increasing part of the population. In this sense, precariousness is not an undesired effect of the system's operations - and, therefore, a challenge to be taken up by the state and/or the public - but a condition of possibility for its own reproduction. In other words, precariousness has been progressively entrenched as a new historical condition. The configuration of this new scenario has a direct impact on the construction of a specific type of subjectivity, which is promoted both at the general level of culture and in the specific

field of formal educational institutions. It will be in the latter, where - as we will review - figures characteristic of educational precariousness will emerge.

Underlying this proposal is a «multiple» use or a «hybrid» approach to the notion of neoliberalism (Saura, 2015). On the one hand, and in a perspective closer to the «materialist» versions, we understand that this is a system of production, circulation and consumption that generates -and requires- the massive plundering and impoverishment of the living conditions of large sections of the population. That is, it thrives on and produces massive degrees of economic and political inequality resulting in poverty, mass suffering, and unchecked notions of despair. On the other hand, and this is where we will focus our attention in this paper, we understand that this mode of production, circulation and consumption induces a type of subjectivity and configuration of the social bond that acts as a support for its own expansion and perpetuation. Fear and insecurity rather than viewed as social problems become part of the ideological scaffolding that neoliberalism uses to legitimate itself. In this second approach, neoliberalism constitutes not only an infrastructural system, but also a model of biographical construction and a framework of political regulation. However, it must be understood that the processes of neoliberalisation are not static, unidirectional, closed or homogeneous (Saura, 2021). Hence, the imposition of the new neoliberal educational order is never a «finished», immovable or uncontested work. On the contrary, it is due to its own dynamism that the processes of neoliberalisation generate new scenarios -or, at least, produce openings, gaps or interstices- for the unfolding of counter-hegemonic disputes or interruptions. While the underlying principles of neoliberalism, extending from privatization to the belief that the market should be a template for shaping the whole of social life are clear, how such forces manifest themselves ideologically and economically is always a contextual issue rooted in a range of complex forces. It is precisely in this double aspect of neoliberalism (as a system of production of objects and, fundamentally, as a system of production of subjects) and in the complex understanding of neoliberalisation as an «open» process, that the matrix of our analysis will be inscribed.

For the purpose of its presentation, we have divided the work into four sections. In the first, we review the relationship between neoliberalism and precariousness, noting that the latter has been introduced as a device of governmentality and as a new historical condition of the subjects. In the second section, we investigate the impact of this relationship on the cultural dimension. In this respect, we propose that it is precisely here in which the objective need for the expansion of the system through precariousness and the configuration of a subjectivity that normalises and naturalises the new historical condition intersect. To this end, cultural policies oriented by what we have called «pedagogies of precariousness» are established.

In the third section, we highlight the transmission and circulation of these informal pedagogies within the institutional or formal education system. With this aim, we present three figures that have become hegemonic in this space: the entrepreneur, the apprentice and the teacher as technician, all of which are ways of habituating -disciplining or domesticating- the subjects to experience their biographical and social reality within the new historical condition.

Finally, in the last section we explore the political-pedagogical possibilities that arise in this new educational order. Specifically, we propose the development of a «pedagogy of possibilities» whose objective is to institute new forms of critical praxis that allow the construction of counter-hegemonic alternatives for the future, oriented towards the search for justice and sustained by the experience and the agentic capacity of educational actors.

2. Neoliberalism and precariousness: a new historical condition

The neoliberal reforms implemented globally in recent decades, albeit with differential gradualness and depth between regions and countries, have overturned the matrix of what was traditionally understood under the notion of *precariousness*, as well as the public -mainly state- forms produced to address it. During the 19th and 20th centuries, the period of the emergence and consolidation of industrial or Fordist capitalism, precarity was conceived as a dimension that affected specific groups characterised by vulnerability, insecurity and exclusion derived from their positions, ascriptions and/or social identities. In this context, the way to regulate this precariousness was the establishment of social protection mechanisms. The ideological-political underpinning for the construction of the European and North American *welfare state*, as well as the Latin American developmental state, was precisely to provide that protection to the precarious sectors in the face of the threat posed by their unstable situation. Therefore, as Lorey (2016) states, «protection against insecurity, against precariousness, is also the task of the social state in the 20th century» (p. 26).

This argument does not mean that it was a minority or was reduced to social minimums or margins, but it was fundamentally understood and defined as an abnormality or an exceptionality in the face of which the state had to mobilise protective resources to strengthen the position of those adversely affected by this situation. Precariousness, therefore, was a social reality which, as an unwanted or undesired exceptionality, was conceived as a problem that the state had a public responsibility to address and regulate.

This modern matrix of precariousness has been completely disrupted by neoliberal logic and by the concrete returns that this model has demonstrated in its global application. Indeed, if *modern precariousness* was conceived as an exceptionality, *neoliberal precariousness* has been consolidated as a historical condition that has become normalized. In other words, the generalisation of precariousness and its structural insertion into the social fabric is part and parcel of the new world order.

In practice, this neoliberal logic is crucial in the search for a minimum balance between the greatest possible withdrawal of the state and the production of a generalised extreme poverty that must be managed at a minimum threshold of protection for its reproduction as an inactive or socio-politically «sterilized» mass¹.

¹ This, of course, in reference to the part of humanity that is still «productive» or functional to the neoliberal systemic mandate. For, concomitant with the massification of the precariat, the new order also multiplies the caste of the pariah, that is, that portion of humanity -strictly speaking, the ever-widening band of «subhumans»- whose lives are disposable from the point of view and in the interests of the new global capitalism (Bauman, 2005).

The neoliberal order thus extends the condition of precariousness to a significant part of the population and instrumentalises the mechanisms of state protection -reducing them to their minimum possible expression, but always maintaining a latent presence- to prevent this generalised condition from becoming massively intolerable and, therefore, susceptible of being reconverted into a destructive power of the very order that produces it. This new conception places the processes of precarisation not as an undesired effect or as an exceptionality that is the object of public-state regulation, but as an instrument of government or a device of governmentality. Moreover, by individualizing many of the problems underlying precarity among vast populations caught in its grips, it ascribes conditions of immiseration as a problem of individual character rather than as systemic issue.

To govern through insecurity -and to keep subjects and populations governable in conditions of minimal provision of public services and constant uncertainty as to whether they can reproduce their own existence- is the expression of the new conditions that structure the forms of life in the neoliberal order. In Lorey's words:

Since rule in post-Fordist societies is no longer legitimised on the basis of (social) security, but rather on the basis of insecurity, precariousness and immunity, insecurity and protection are less and less placed in a situation of opposition and more and more in a relationship of graduation, within the scope of a regulated threshold of what is (still) governable. A decisive basis for this development is that precarisation in neoliberalism is to be found in a process of normalisation that makes it possible to govern through insecurity. In neoliberalism precarisation is, so to speak, democratised (Lorey, 2016, p. 26)².

It is precisely this normalisation of precariousness that is the new historical condition imposed on the subject and social actors in today's world. And it is these principles in mind that structural reforms have been oriented and implemented in recent decades, both in the educational system and in the cultural field of which it forms part.

In this respect, we argue that, in order to support the extension and consolidation of precarity as a historical condition of the «neoliberal subject», the cultural field reproduces a type of pedagogy that promotes collective indifference to the new conditions of life and then attempts the defusing of agentic possibilities in a transformative direction. Consequently, given that formal educational institutions are part of the wider cultural system, thus this social pedagogy is embodied in figures of precariousness specific to these institutions: the entrepreneur, the teacher as technician, the student as an apprentice, among others.

Thus, both in culture and in formal educational institutions, lines of restructuring emerge that are spurred by the neoliberal mandate and which, as a whole, aim at a passive adaptation or a tacit adhesion to the new historical condition, that is, a

² And for further elaboration he adds: «Individuals are expected to adapt and actively modulate their lives on the basis of the repeatedly lowered minimum of assurance and thus become governable» (Lorey, 2016, p. 79).

teaching and learning of precariousness as a normal dimension in the biographical trajectory of each individual.

It is this process of gradation, particularly in the «pedagogy of precariousness» from the general cultural field to the institutional educational space, and the specific educational figures in which this pedagogy is embodied, that we intend to outline in the following sections.

3. Neoliberalism and cultural policy: pedagogies of precariousness

Regular education is part of a complex web of networks -formal and informal- of cultural transmission (Apple, 2021; Rivera-Vargas, Miño-Puigcercós, Passerón et al., 2022). Therefore, what happens in schools, universities and other institutional bodies of knowledge transmission is deeply imbued -whether in the form of an explicit curriculum or a hidden curriculum (Giroux, 2004; Torres, 2005)- with the principles, values and precepts that emanate from the broader field of culture.

In this context - and to the extent that precariousness is progressively spreading as a historical condition faced by a significant part of the population - culture produces, reproduces and circulates through different media a type of social, every day and informal pedagogy that is instrumental to the naturalisation of this reality, while stimulating the passive adaptation of people to the emerging living conditions (De Sousa, Rivera-Vargas, Ferrante, et al., 2022).

It is precisely in this pedagogical dimension of the cultural field that the «material» modes of current accumulation and exploitation intersect with the need to produce a specific type of social subjectivity based on the acceptance/resignation of the individual position and public indifference to the fate of the precariat and the suffering «others»³. In Segato's words:

The current paradigm of exploitation involves an enormous variety of forms of unprotection and precariousness of life, and this modality of exploitation depends on a principle of cruelty consisting in the diminution of the empathy of the subjects. As I have stated on other occasions, capital today depends on our being able to become accustomed to the spectacle of cruelty in a very precise sense: that we naturalise the expropriation of life, the predation, that is, that we have no receptors for the communicative act of the one who is captured by the process of consumption. Expropriating the vital breath comes to be seen as a mere procedure that does not involve pain, that cannot be communicated, a machinic act, like any consumption (Segato, 2018, p. 14).

³ We initially use this expression, to the detriment of others such as oppressed or exploited, because it reflects a more biographical or experiential perspective of «oppression» and more plural with respect to the ascriptions (social, identity, gender, race, class, etc.) of the «oppressed» subject. However, when we subsequently use expressions such as «oppressed» or other similar expressions, it must be understood that we are referring to the plurality of actors -individuals and/or collectives- who occupy a position of subordination and who, as a consequence of this ascription, are subjected to structural conditioning factors that expose them to contempt, indignity, exploitation, in short, to dehumanising and arbitrary suffering.

As can be observed in the extract, the need for capital in the current phase requires the production of a culture based on extreme individualism and, more importantly, on absolute indifference to the pain of others, which is reduced in its human condition to the quality of a «thing». This is what the author of the quote calls a «pedagogy of cruelty» or a «pedagogy of things» (Segato, 2018, p. 16). That is, as de Sousa states, a pedagogy that tends towards the «trivialisation of human suffering» (de Sousa, 2019, p. 143). This culture of cruelty is endemic to neoliberalism given its separation of economic and political activity from any sense of social costs. What we have here is the death of ethics and a flight from any sense of social responsibility furthering the legitimization of precarity as a source of individual and mass violence. (Giroux, 2022).

It is precisely at this interface between the objective needs of the system -and its logic of plundering expansion- and the production of a specific subjectivity that is instrumental to this expansion, that the pedagogical process is embedded in the cultural field (Giroux & McLaren, 2011).

In other words, the expansion of capital is currently sustained by the condemnation of millions to the condition of the precariat and its progressive multiplication as an oppressed social segment. Therefore, for precariousness - as a situation that is materially necessary for the reproduction of the neoliberal order - to spread without inducing massive or risky resistance to the very systemic scaffolding of the model, a social subjectivity is required to which the pain and suffering of the other is «natural». That is to say, it is necessary to socialise the individual in indifference towards those who are subject to the experience of vulnerability and the absolute exposure of their human condition.

It is this programme of social desensitisation and the internalisation of a true «predatory culture» (McLaren, 1997) that the «pedagogies of precariousness» are heading. Thus, these are expressed in all those socio-cultural processes or instances of subject formation that aim, regardless of their motivation or explicit objective, to teach social indifference and disregard, or even contempt, in response to the pain of others and collective oppression, all framed in a context of the normalisation of precariousness as a mass socio-historical condition. The pedagogies of precariousness, in short, are those through which the learning of extreme individualism, chronic indolence and absolute disengagement promoted by the «predatory culture» of neoliberalism (McLaren, 1997)⁴ is developed.

From this perspective, the «pedagogies of precarity», rather than the knowledge of the world let alone its hypothetical transformation- fundamentally teach ignorance, both about the structures of oppression (in this case the structure of mass precarisation or, simply put, the neoliberal scaffolding) and about the other as a precarised and suffering subject. It is in this precise sense that positions that affirm that «the current

⁴ Regarding such a culture the author states: «Predatory culture is a field of invisibility -of predators and victims- precisely because it is so obvious. Its obviousness immunises victims against a full disclosure of its threatening capacities (...) Predatory culture, naturalised and entrenched in primitive accumulation, has outgrown its own wild fantasies of acquisition and shed its façade of civility and its window-dressing compassion. It can show itself naked in its atrocious splendour; it does not have to acclaim its righteousness or its goodness; it can now survive perfectly well without mask or camouflage» (McLaren, 2007, p. 18).

progress of ignorance, far from being a deplorable dysfunction of our society, has become a necessary condition for its own expansion» (Michéa, 2018, p. 14) acquire relevance. Such ignorance, of course, is not neutral to the interests of those who promote it, nor is it innocuous or «aseptic» in its political-pedagogical effects and returns. On the contrary, it aims to deactivate the capacity of social actors to act. That is to say, the annulment of their inherent transformative or emancipatory capacity as historical subjects (Freire, 2012; Giroux, 2003). In Michéa's words,

We understand by «progress of ignorance» not so much as the disappearance of indispensable knowledge in the sense usually (and very often justifiably) denounced, but the steady decline of *critical intelligence*, that is, the fundamental aptitude of humankind to understand both the world in which it lives and the conditions under which the rebellion against this world becomes a moral necessity (Michéa, 2018, p. 15).

It is in this socio-cultural context of the proliferation of «pedagogies of precariousness», of socialisation in indolence and of the expansion of ignorance in a «demobilizing» and anti-agency sense that the action of formal educational institutions takes place.

4. Neoliberalism and Formal Education: Institutional Figures of Precarity

Over the last decades, neoliberal reforms have structurally modified school governance models, generating a «new world educational order» (Anderson, 2018). On the whole, these transformations have tended to privatise the ownership and/or management of institutions and to commodify formal educational resources and processes (Laval, 2018; Verger, Fontdevila & Zancajo, 2016), as has occurred, for example and paradigmatically, in the Chilean case (Ruiz, Reyes & Herrera, 2018) and in other countries of the traditionally so-called Third World, now renamed the Global South (Picoli & Gilherme, 2021). At the same time, and at a top-down level, state educational work has been centralised through the implementation of external and standardised evaluation processes and the establishment of public regulations for the supervision of compliance with educational «quality» indicators, on the results of which the subsequent private use of public resources depends (Falabella, 2015; Ruiz, Reyes and Herrera, 2018; Fernández, García & Galindo, 2017).

Such reforms and regulations have followed the guidelines emanating from the main multilateral and international financial organisations (OECD, World Bank, IMF, etc.), implementing the guidelines of New Public Management at the educational level (Falabella, 2015; Morales, 2014; Sisto & Fardella, 2014). This has been referred to as educational «managerialism» (Gewirtz & Ball, 2000; Sisto, 2019), new managerialism (Anderson, 2018) or, if preferred and more «crudely», as the «school of total capitalism» (Michéa, 2018, p.39).

In this context of global transformations and restructuring, the «pedagogies of precarity» can be easily recognised in the «old» approaches that, since the 1960s and 1970s, denounced the educational system as an institution of economic

(Bowles & Gintis, 1985), ideological (Althusser, 1974) and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1995), all of them developed to demonstrate the ways in which social inequality and the relations of domination inherent to the capitalist model are perpetuated. In addition, these can be identified in the contestation -or complementation- to the reproductionist theses developed by critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2004), a political-pedagogical perspective that demonstrated the ways in which power modulated hegemonic and exclusionary forms of subjectivity, while illustrating the resistance that these impositions induced in socio-school actors (Giroux, 1985; McLaren a& Kincheloe; 2008; McLaren, 2005; Willis, 2017).

Basically, what we want to point out is that the «pedagogies of precariousness» -as instances of social disengagement, radical denial of the other and promotion of indolence- can be identified without much difficulty in the «classic» topics that for decades have been enunciated as generalised phenomena in formal education systems: naturalisation of inequality, racism, xenophobia, sexism, coercive imposition of hegemonic identities, indoctrination, authoritarianism, violence, amongst others. These problems are blatantly known, but they do not stop being part of the «pedagogies of precariousness» and must still be denounced and combated.

However, what we are interested in highlighting here are the less obvious and more subtle forms that have been legitimised in the new educational order and through which such pedagogies are inadvertently embedded in the context of the neoliberal school. Indeed, formal educational institutions currently promote certain figures that acquire social pre-eminence and in which the neoliberal pedagogical ethos is embodied. However, under the «positive» cloak of these hegemonic figures, pedagogies doomed to the naturalisation of precariousness are masked.

Concretely, what is educationally presented as the desirable horizon constitutes, in our opinion, the consolidation of pedagogical premises which, rather than in the crude and «strident» exposure of the indolence fostered by the prevailing «predatory culture», operate in an underhand manner to achieve the acceptance of precariousness as a «natural» condition of life.

From these figures, we will briefly review three that we consider to be of particular relevance in the neoliberal educational context: the entrepreneur, the apprentice and the teacher as technician.

The entrepreneur

One of the main figures promoted in the neoliberal educational order is that of the entrepreneur. The entrepreneur is conceived as an individual who, devoid of institutional certainties and securities or protection, must achieve through whatever means and risk - a via of material survival which, at the same time, will result in some kind of social benefit.

Entrepreneurship, legitimised under the slogan of individual freedom, rational choice and the necessary flexibility in an ever-changing socio-labour context, has been progressively gaining ground in school and university curricula and in the political-pedagogical imaginary. The entrepreneur is the dominant figure in neoliberal pedagogical subjectivity and the incarnation of its own «success».

However, under this garb of exaltation of freedom, the teaching of precariousness is hidden. On the one hand, the individualistic neoliberal subject who must

seek exclusively personal interest as an ideal of public action. On the other, the neoliberal subject is exposed to insecurity in the face of the most absolute social and institutional lack of protection. The neoliberals, in both cases, are themselves solely responsible for the success or failure of their entrepreneurial action. Given the structural precariousness to which they are exposed, they must rely on themselves and their entrepreneurial capacity.

The entrepreneur, therefore, is a human being educated to survive where the possibility of material and vital reproduction is not assured. In other words, this subject is trained to accept insecurity as the result of its own exclusive biographical activity, making asymmetrical structures, power relations and social-identity ascriptions (class, gender, race, etc.) invisible and that ultimately hinder or differentially favour a certain position within the social framework.

Entrepreneurship, therefore, is a figure that exalts personal success but privatizes failure, attributing the social position of the subject to individual responsibility, maintaining existing inequalities unquestioned and exempting the system as a whole from the operations of power that structurally produce precariousness. It is thus a figure that restores, now in a «charismatic» way, the theories of reproduction. Thus, educational failure - and the precarious destiny it entails - is no longer the result of some ideological deficit or socio-cultural deprivation of their environment, but of personality or character deficiencies (lack of initiative, lack of creativity, lack of motivation, low ambition, etc.).

The figure of the entrepreneur, in short, reveals an education aimed at the acceptance of precariousness and insecurity as a biographical condition inherent to the new social order. This figure manages to obliterate the question of the injustice or arbitrariness of this order, recognising the destiny -of success or failure- that «entrepreneurs» forge for themselves as their own and justified.

What has been pointed out up to this point implies an absolute displacement of the subject that formal educational institutions promote and for whom they are intended. In the words of Fernández, García & Galindo (2017):

The citizen, as a subject of rights in a constitutional guaranteeing order, loses its protagonism in favour of a new type of subjectivity that must be formed and constructed: the entrepreneur. (...) Teaching citizens is not the same as teaching entrepreneurs (...) In moving from one plane to the other, we move from the universe of rights and freedoms to that of a completely different human material: individuals who face the world alone and must no longer be so much instructed in knowledge and subjects, but rather 'trained' in 'competences', and technical and emotional 'skills' (p. 8).

It is precisely this transmutation of the subject of education from citizen to entrepreneur that paves the way to the second figure that the «pedagogies of precariousness» imprint on the formal educational establishment: the apprentice.

The apprentice

Attacks on «rote», content-centred, rigid and disciplinary education -modes of the traditional «Grammar» of schooling (Tyack & Tobin, 1994)- have given rise to a new paradigm of teaching that is widely disseminated by international organisations, both educational and financial, whilst at the same time guiding the course of educational reforms globally: learning skills and competencies.

This new paradigm -and the respective «ideology of competence» that shapes it (Chauí, 2014)- in the same way that it takes conceptual inputs from the business world («competences», as in the previous case with the notion of «entrepreneurship»), assumes an instrumental access to learning. One «learns to learn» not from a metacognitive or political perspective (learning to recognise the internal processes that allow for a better understanding of the world and, therefore, greater possibilities for influencing it) but from a functional perspective: acquiring skills to adapt to a constantly changing context and where there is a programmed obsolescence of «hard» knowledge.

Thus, what is relevant in this type of education is the acquisition of skills that enable individuals to modify their socio-labour insertion as market demands and/or advances in production technologies rapidly generate new training needs for «human capital». Therefore, as Michéa (2018) points out, «this is *disposable knowledge*, as disposable as the humans who provisionally hold it, insofar as, being based on routine competences (...), it ceases to be operative as soon as its own context is outgrown» (p. 44).

This disposable knowledge fundamentally reveals a «hollowing out» of learning. And, more importantly for our purpose, it operates surreptitiously as a mechanism for naturalising precariousness. In effect, the «competent» person is a figure who is able to adapt skilfully to different contexts, thereby assuming the uncertainty and insecurity of any socio-occupational situation and that the social position acquired will never be guaranteed.

As in the figure of the entrepreneur, the rhetoric of flexibility and multiple skills conceals the precariousness of neoliberal life and the acceptance of an order in which the reproduction of life itself is left to individual «juggling».

The learning of competences, therefore, is a training process which accustoms the subject to be permanently mobilised in different and changing scenarios, all of which are inherently unstable, with no greater safeguard than the possession of an accumulation of generic «competences» that could circumstantially help in becoming part of the new -and at the same time obsolescent- current scenario. It is the logic of perpetual insecurity that is instilled in this record.

Learning skills means, in short, acquiring instrumental tools -generally rudimentary- to accustom the «apprentice» to a world where chronic insecurity constitutes the core of the subjects' new historical condition. This process, as already outlined, promotes the normalisation of a precarious and self-responsible life in order to obtain the never-assured means of their own survival.

What the hegemonic discourse ultimately omits is that the touted slogan of «lifelong learning» or «lifewide learning» is politically and pedagogically correct and descriptively relevant only to the extent that it reveals what is omitted by the hidden curriculum that underpins it: that it is in fact «learning (for precarity) throughout life».

The teacher as technician

Neoliberal educational reforms have revived a classic topic in contemporary pedagogical debate, namely the status of teachers. Indeed, for decades there has been a «technocratic» definition of the status of teachers and critical positions regarding the vision of the teacher that these positions promote (Freire, 2012; Giroux & McLaren, 2011; Giroux, 1997)⁵.

However, in the new neoliberal educational order, the technical character of teachers has been redefined -and reinforced- under the so-called «new professionalism» (Anderson, 2018; Goodson & Hargreaves, 2006; Sisto, 2011). In this way, neoliberalising reforms have not only made an impact on the governance structures of the education system but also on the production of the subjectivities of its actors (Anderson, 2018; Gewirtz & Ball, 2000). In this context, the application of the principles of New Public Management to the field of education has put pressure on the redefining of teachers' professional identity.

Specifically, accountability policies, the association of salary and job position with the results of standardised tests, the progressive demand for external teacher evaluation and other similar dynamics have resulted in pressure for «results» -understood as the main indicator of educational «quality»- and in an external bureaucratisation -albeit centralised by the «Evaluating State»- of professional practice.

This pressure has had a direct impact on many areas of the professional, occupational and personal development of education workers. First, and most obviously, the new situation means immediate exposure to precariousness and insecurity. Indeed, since neoliberal policies in education subordinate the salary and the job to the display of results in standardised tests, the teacher's job position becomes vulnerable and constitutively unstable. In essence, it makes the job offer - and each teacher in particular - become replaceable since it is dependent on the «results» obtained. Because of this, chronic job insecurity and the impossibility of ensuring the necessary conditions for the full development of their own lives' spreads among teachers. Precariousness, therefore, is directly set in the school scenario, affecting both materially and psychically one of its central actors.

But also, the new forms of «professionalism» have further distanced teachers from the production of pedagogical knowledge. Indeed, to the point that teachers are confined to the role of «technicians» and are pressured to demonstrate results in standardised tests, their role tends to be reduced to the application of techniques and procedures decided at another level of the educational governance structure: that of the «experts». In the words of Fernández, García & Galindo (2017):

There is now a polarisation between 'experts in educational sciences', who draw up the prescriptions, and teachers, who become mere executors

⁵ In fact, this division between the 'experts' and the teacher conceived as a «technician» finds its place of origin in the rapprochements that have taken place between the school system and the world of capitalist enterprise. As Helsby and McCulloch (2006) point out, such a division «is very much in line with Taylorist principles of "scientific management", involving the separation between "planning" and "implementation" in the interests of line production efficiency» (p. 65).

in charge of applying innovations and standardised procedures. Teachers become 'educational technicians' or, if one prefers, mere 'curriculum dispensers' subjected to a progressive proletarianisation (p.73).

The division between «experts» and «technicians» aims to disassociate teachers from the epistemological-political questions of the knowledge that is circulated in educational spaces. The mechanical application of procedures to achieve specific performances in standardised tests hides the basic debate around the status of educational knowledge: What is the valid knowledge to be transmitted? Who produces this knowledge? By what means is this procedure legitimized? and What interests does this knowledge serve? Basically, the figure of the teacher as a «technician» hides the relations that exist between knowledge and power and how these relations are structured in the educational field to promote a specific type of subjectivity and social order (Apple, 2018; Giroux & McLaren, 2011; Giroux, 2004).

The expert/technician split and the masking of the status of educational knowledge promoted by the neoliberal educational order is not innocuous. One of the functions of the «technician» is that of demobilising the agentic possibilities of teachers. Thus, to the extent that teachers are reduced to mere dispensers of «pedagogical prescriptions», and their reflective, deliberative and resolute function (basically their possibility of political-pedagogical praxis) is subordinated, when not directly contested and combated, to the demands of «professionalization» understood as an extension of the methodological «prescription book». Thus, the role of the teacher is to apply and not to decide -least of all to transform- the knowledge and forms of transmission designed in a place far removed from the practice and the agents external to it. In other words, they are reduced to the mere function of a «conveyor belt» of knowledge -conceptual and «practical»- selected by the experts.

Thus, in short, the «pedagogies of precariousness» act at the educational level in the same way as they do at the social level, i.e. they structurally weaken the stability of positions -in this case of the teaching profession- and introduce insecurity as a device of governmentality that promotes -and is sustained by- the deactivation of the agentic capacity of social and school actors.

5. Recomposing the possibilities in the new political-pedagogical context

What has been pointed out so far may generate an image of absolute domination of the hegemonic system with respect to the subjects that inhabit it. Assuming such an image implies recognising that it effectively manages to shut down the capacity for reflection and action of social and educational actors. This is precisely the limit presented by many of the old and new critical perspectives, which range from the theories of reproduction to the theses of New Public Management and educational «managerialism».

Basically, all these approaches, to a greater or lesser degree, assume the perspective of the system -even when it is deeply criticised- and assume that the system deploys its principles and interests in a uniform, homogeneous and uncontested way until it fully imposes its mandate. This «top-down» view, from

the perspective of domination⁶, ignores the concrete experiences and everyday historical practices of educational actors (Giroux, 2003; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2008; Giroux & McLaren, 2011; Neut & Miño, 2018). As such, they represent only one side of the coin.

Thus, and from a theoretical and analytical dimension, such approaches are insufficient to understand the educational reality - and particularly those associated with everyday life - if they do not consider the ways in which this systemic mandate is confronted -resisted, subverted, hybridised, reinvented and even accepted- in the concrete experience of the subjects (McLaren, 2005; Willis, 2017; Neut, Miño & Rivera-Vargas, 2022). In turn, from a political-pedagogical perspective, assuming the vision of the system -and the consequent «verification» of absolute domination- generates a petrified image of the educational reality that ends up promoting the same immobilism that these positions seek to criticise and transform.

Therefore, it is necessary to recognise that from the same dynamism and complexity that characterises the processes of neoliberal precariousness (Saura, 2021), new forms of contestation and interruption and original opportunities for action emerge (Lorey, 2016). For the pedagogical field this implies confronting the current conditions of the neoliberal educational order with an attitude of «radical hope» (Giroux, 2003; McLaren, 1994) that enables the construction of a «pedagogy of possibilities» (Giroux, Rivera-Vargas & Neut, 2022). Basically, what we want to emphasise is that the system of domination is not incarnated unidirectionally and appropriately in the subjectivity of school actors and that, for those of us who are convinced of the unjust and inhuman character that this order imprints on the educational field, there are possibilities for transformative praxis.

Therefore, a pedagogy of possibilities -as the antithesis of the «pedagogies of precariousness»- is precisely that which denaturalises the current social and educational order but does not limit itself to the verification of its pretensions of dominance, but rather provides inputs and tools for its radical redefinition based on the concrete experience and interests and motivations of its actors (Giroux, Rivera & Neut, 2022; Rivera-Vargas, Neu & Neut, 2020). It is, therefore, a pedagogy of opposition (McLaren, 1997), but also of openings (Giroux, 2003).

Hence, the «pedagogy of possibilities» is one that assumes the historicity of subjects and socio-educational processes -and therefore the conflictive and disputed, but always open, and with the future in mind. It projects this historicity not only to resist- an unavoidable and necessary dimension, but solely referred to from the horizon of domination -but mainly to build another different future, democratically

⁶ In this regard, Giroux and McLaren (2011) critically state: «Despite its success in its theoretical understanding and political analysis of schooling, radical educational theory suffered from some serious challenges, the most significant being its failure to move beyond the language of critique and domination. That is, radical educators remained mired in a language that links schools to the ideology and practices of domination (...Thus) they have not been able to develop a theory of schooling that offers a viable possibility of counter-hegemonic struggle and ideological contestation. Within this discourse, schools, teachers, and students are often implicitly seen as extensions of the logic of capital alone. Rather than grappling with schools as spaces of contestation, negotiation, and conflict, radical educators tend to produce an oversimplified version of domination, which suggests that schools cannot be seen as spaces that offer the possibility of intervention and constructive change» (pp. 117-118).

and collectively decided and constructed. In essence, it is a pedagogy informed by an emancipatory desire⁷.

In order to realise these objectives, the «pedagogy of possibilities» must not only unveil the domesticating and adaptive character of current education, criticise the neoliberal principles embodied by its predominant figures -the entrepreneur, the apprentice, the teacher as technician and others- and denounce the precarious objective behind the discourse of freedom that praises them. In addition, it must also rethink new modes of literacy that allow the ideological contents of educational discourses to be exposed while making the creation of other counter-hegemonic or alternative discourses - and subject positions a reality.

It is precisely in the context of this pedagogy that the role of «civic literacy» (Giroux, Rivera & Neut, 2022) or «critical literacy» (McLaren, 1994, p. 53)⁸, which, in the words of Giroux and McLaren (2011), aims at:

To provide students with counter-discourses or subject 'positions' of resistance - in short, a new language of analysis - through which they can assume a critical distance from their more familiar subject positions in order to engage in a praxis better devised to further the project of social transformation (p. 142).

The «pedagogies of possibility», therefore, along with combating the training for neoliberal precariousness imposed by the current educational order, actively works to elaborate a theory, a language and a practice -amalgamated in the same line of action, that is, in a praxis- that allow subjects to position themselves as active agents in the deliberation and construction of their own world and, to the extent that this world is projective, in the dispute for the future. In other words, this pedagogy develops a literacy and a type of subjectivity actively committed to a radical democracy (Giroux, 2009).

⁷ In this regard, we endorse Joe Kincheloe's (2008) clarification of what is meant by critical emancipation: «Those who seek emancipation seek to gain the power to control their own lives in solidarity with a justice-oriented community. Here, critical enquiry seeks to expose the forces that prevent individuals and groups from being able to make the decisions that crucially affect their lives. In this way, greater levels of autonomy and human agency can be achieved. In the first decade of the 21st century we must be cautious in the use of the term 'emancipation' because as many critics and critics have pointed out, no one can be completely emancipated from the socio-political context from which he or she comes. At the same time, many have used the term to designate the freedom that an abstract individual achieves when he or she gains access to Western reason, that is, when he or she becomes reasonable. Our use of emancipation in an evolving criticality rejects any use of the term in that context» (p. 42).

⁸ And on this point, critical and radical pedagogy has constantly highlighted the relationship between language, power and the construction of reality, affirming that the predominant type of literacy participates in a cultural and ideological universe that reinforces -or contests- the particular interests of the social sectors that are the depositories of that language and of the relations of subordination that it promotes. In this sense, literacy is always an eminently political process (Apple, 2008; Freire, 1985; Giroux, 2004; Giroux & McLaren, 2011; McLaren, 1994).

To conclude, we would like to highlight two central issues that emerge from the above. The first of these concerns the pedagogical link. Indeed, in order for a «pedagogy of possibilities» to be able to fulfil its objective, it must break away from the roles traditionally established by the educational system. Specifically, since the type of subjectivity it aims for is that of mutual commitment to justice and the power of collective deliberation, then it must cease to operate with the «banking» logic (Freire, 1985) or with the hierarchies that prevent egalitarian communication between subjects. Thus, instead of the formal roles and functions that the establishment assigns to educational actors, what is encouraged in this proposal is «linkage» (Segato, 2018, p. 17; Neut, Miño & Rivera, 2022). In this way, such a pedagogy is inscribed in the «historical project of links», precisely that which takes precedence over the «historical project of things» -that which reduces the subject to the condition of object, thereby inoculating apathy and indolence- characteristic of the neoliberal «pedagogy of cruelty» (Segato, 2018). At its core, the linkage promoted by this pedagogy rejects the atomising individualism of the neoliberal project - and of its educational figures - and aims to create and consolidate «communities of trust and affirmation» (McLaren, 1994, p. 43).

The second relevant question concerns the status of the teacher. In this direction, one of the first-order tasks for the «pedagogy of possibilities» is to challenge the figure of the teacher as a «technician» -in the sense previously reviewed- and to reinscribe its public position as a «transformative intellectual» (Giroux & McLaren, 2011; Giroux, 1997; McLaren, 1994), defined as follows:

By the term 'transformative intellectual' we mean one who exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practices that attempt to place teaching and learning directly in the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle for power relations. We are referring to one whose intellectual practices are necessarily grounded in forms of moral and ethical discourse, exhibiting a preferential concern for the sufferings and struggles of those who are disadvantaged and oppressed. Here we expand the traditional view of the intellectual as one capable of analysing varied interests and contradictions within society into one capable of articulating emancipatory possibilities and working towards their realisation (Giroux & McLaren, 2011, p. 75).

Thus, and as the quote reveals, the creation of a new horizon of pedagogical and social possibility requires a teaching practice that combats the indolence and disregard for the suffering of others promoted by the «pedagogies of precariousness» and, instead, engages in an emancipatory and humanising praxis. This is the precondition for the effective development of a «pedagogy of possibilities» and the ethical and political responsibility of those of us who believe in a just and liberating education.

6. Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this article is aimed at addressing the following questions: What is the «status» of precarity in the current order and under what figures does it manifest itself -implicitly or inadvertently- in the contemporary educational field?

In this respect, we have reviewed how the massification of precariousness, and through it the configuration of new devices for governing the population, are consubstantial dimensions of the neoliberal order. In this sense, the process of neoliberalisation inaugurates a new framework of social and political regulation. The successful implementation of this framework requires the naturalisation of precariousness as a mass phenomenon to which everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, is exposed, or in short, its acceptance/adhesion as a new historical condition. In this direction, the neoliberal scaffolding must induce the production of a type of subjectivity that normalises the structural insecurity to which individuals are subjected in this emerging condition.

It is precisely in the cultural field that the intersection between the objective need for expansion through precarisation and the specific type of reifying subjectivation which is functional to it takes place. The interface of both dimensions is expressed in the establishment of cultural policies oriented by «pedagogies of precarity». These aim to instill in each individual an indolence towards the pain of others and public indifference to private and collective suffering. In other words, it is a type of training in a «pedagogy of cruelty» (Segato, 2018).

This cultural policy has directed the educational reforms of the last decades at a global level. The consequent neoliberal pedagogical order that emerges from this restructuring action calls into question the very meaning of the educational institution. In the words of Fernández, García & Galindo (2017):

In this 'educational revolution' what is at stake is, quite simply, whether there will continue to be something that we strictly call Public School or whether we will call 'public school' an immense governmental *coaching* mechanism to manage the emotional stability of large masses of the population condemned to a life of precariousness (p. 25).

It is in this context that it becomes urgent to develop a new pedagogy that is both oppositional and open. Oppositional insofar as it resolutely combats indolence, teaches empathy regarding the suffering of others, un.masks domination and unveils the naturalisation of the neoliberal order and its guiding principles. As regards openness since it enables new critical records to build counter-hegemonic alternatives for the future oriented towards the search for a radical democracy and new horizons of justice that aim at individual and collective well-being.

It is through this double movement that the «pedagogy of possibilities» attempts to confront, answer, interrupt and/or confront the precariousness that imposes itself as a new historical condition and as a new educational axiom. And it is towards this that the creative and constructive efforts of actors committed to justice and

the development of an emancipatory education must be directed. That is to say, one that understands pedagogy not as a training technique or as an institution of subjectivation for adherence to a given order, but as an ethical and political process in which subjects acquire critical tools and establish social -human- relations that stimulate public deliberation about the future and the world in which they want -and deserve- to live.

7. References

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