



The performative dimension of teaching and the classroom as a stage of action

A docência como performance e a sala de aula como tablado da ação

La docencia como performance y el aula como tablado de la acción

Josiane Raquel Pivato Echeverria¹

 [0009-0007-9033-5697](https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9033-5697)

André de Souza Macedo²

 [0000-0003-1901-2944](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1901-2944)

Abstract: The text analyzes teaching in Primary Education as a performative practice shaped by bodily, affective, and gendered dimensions. From an autobiographical and critical perspective, it highlights the overload that falls mainly on female teachers, who are responsible for tasks that go beyond teaching, such as care and emotional mediation. Combined with gender inequalities and deterioration of work conditions intensified by managerial policies and digital platforms. Such demands produce physical and emotional exhaustion. Drawing on performance studies, the classroom is understood as a space of restored behaviors, where gestures, rituals, and improvisations result in teaching work involved in a construction with the other.

Keywords: Educate. Teaching performance. Classroom. Sensitivity.

Resumo: O texto analisa a docência no Ensino Fundamental I como prática performativa atravessada por dimensões corporais, afetivas e de gênero. Em perspectiva autobiográfica e crítica, evidencia a sobrecarga que recai sobretudo sobre professoras, responsáveis por tarefas que extrapolam o ensino, como cuidado e mediação emocional. Associadas às desigualdades de gênero e à precarização intensificada por políticas gerenciais e plataformas digitais, essas exigências produzem exaustão física e emocional. Com base em estudos da performance, a sala de aula é compreendida como espaço de comportamentos restaurados, onde gestos, rituais e improvisações constituem o trabalho docente implicado numa construção com o outro.

Palavras-chave: Educar. Performance docente. Sala de aula. Sensibilidade.

Resumen: El texto analiza la docencia en la Educación Primaria como una práctica performativa atravessada por dimensiones corporales, afectivas y de género. Desde una perspectiva autobiográfica y crítica, se pone de relieve la sobrecarga que recae principalmente sobre las docentes, responsables de tareas que van más allá de la enseñanza, como el cuidado y la mediación emocional. Asociadas a las desigualdades de género y a la precarización intensificada por políticas gerenciales y plataformas digitales, estas exigencias producen agotamiento físico y emocional. A partir de los estudios de la

¹ MA in Latin American Studies, Federal University of Latin-American Integration - UNILA. Teacher for the Municipal Education Secretariat of Foz do Iguaçu - SMED/FI. Lattes: [2611900538095667](http://lattes.cnpq.br/2611900538095667) - E-mail: josiecheverria1977@gmail.com.

² PhD in Theater, University of the State of Santa Catarina - UDESC. Director of Performing Arts at the Federal University of Latin-American Integration and Assistant Professor in the Latin American Studies Program at the same institution. Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2227353208160205> - E-mail: andre.macedo@unila.edu.br.



performance, el aula se comprende como un espacio de comportamientos restaurados, donde gestos, rituales e improvisaciones constituyen el trabajo docente involucrado en una construcción con el otro.

Palabras-clave: Educar. Performance docente. Aula. Sensibilidad.

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First of all

It seems relevant to mention that this text resulted from the collaboration between an elementary school teacher and a director of performing arts, from experiences in the subject *Interdisciplinary Practices and Procedures and Poetic Constructions of Reality*, taught in 2024, in the *Mestrado Interdisciplinar em Estudos Latino-Americanos* [Interdisciplinary Master Program in Latin American Studies] (IELA) at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), which worked as framework and initial impulse for thinking teaching as performance.

To develop such studies, autoethnography was employed since we experienced moments involving writing about oneself and ethnography in the text. According to Ellis (2004) and Holman Jones (2005), autoethnography is a method of investigation and writing that seeks to describe personal experience (*auto*) to understand cultural experiences (*ethno*), thus considered as process and product. In this type of research, the methodology is not built in a linear, neutral or previously defined manner, but rather encompasses the researchers' doubts, experiences and memories. In other words, the researcher's subjectivity alongside personal and professional experiences are used to establish dialogue with the theoretical background chosen as qualified sources to deepen the debate proposed.

Therefore, we understand the work developed as a process, that is, the act of reading, investigating, experimenting and narrating, while the product is the text presented, which originates from the investigation carried out. Thus, the researcher occupies simultaneously the positions of subject and object, observer and participant and creates a powerful space of critical reflections and resistance to hegemonic and colonial discourses.

We chose this path because we aimed to analyze the trajectory of a teacher from her experience and narratives of the school routine. Therefore, we start the debate reporting the difficulties found in school to contrast with discourses around education which advertise its excellence through mark rankings, meritocratic discourses and schooling concepts, but hide a



reality that is not yet compatible with the school practice. Next, we propose some reflections upon the teacher's practice, thinking about the space granted to women in such professional context, and, finally, we add the concept of performance aiming at highlighting the intervention carried out by those professionals in their everyday practice.

December has arrived, and with it the demands of the end-of-year school year. It is a mix of feelings. They include the joy of soon being on vacation, participating in Christmas and New Year's celebrations (times when we gather with family); and the tiredness (so typical of this time of year and the profession). It could not be any different, since I have been a teacher for 25 years, working in a municipal elementary school in the city of Foz do Iguaçu, Paraná, where women predominate. Men are only the physical education teachers, the school principal, and the school secretary. According to Monteiro & Altmann (2021, p. 4) “[...] studies dedicated to observing the teaching career report that, despite being considered a female profession, the career is characterized by male advancement. This can be verified by observing the performance of male teachers in the classroom. When they are teaching, they are generally specialists who spend little time with the same students or are in administrative positions, while at home, they are unaware of some domestic demands, since they are generally single men who do not need to perform activities that tend to fall on women.

For this reason, it is clear on the faces of my colleagues (and mine) the tiredness that affect all of us since in addition to the school tasks, which, it must be said, have worn us out with endless spreadsheets that need to be filled out on time so that perhaps “someone” will read them, there are also family and social commitments imposed by this time of the year. Monteiro & Altmann (2021), supported by Zeila Demartini and Fátima Antunes (1993), reported that

[...] in the first decades of the 20th century, although women were already the majority of teaching professionals at the time, most of them remained working in classrooms up to their retirement. At the same time, men were quickly promoted to managerial positions – with exceptions related to differences in social origin. The advancement, which differed for women, was based on their greater specialization or proximity to the retirement age (Monteiro & Altmann, 2021. p. 4, our translation).

Data previously presented by Monteiro & Altmann (2021), confirm the ideas reported by Sousa & Nunes (2024, p. 175), in the light of Yannoulas (2011), about the 4 initial criteria to provide a basis for women's choice of a teaching career in basic education, two statements



stand out: I. the female teacher is subordinate, as she will only have the role of transmitting knowledge; and III. women are associated with childhood³.

Considering such information, we understand the reason of such a great impact on the bodies and minds of women who work in classrooms. Women, for being more closely related with childhood, form the school's "shop floor⁴", with greater physical and affective involvement with their students. Men usually develop administrative or specialist activities thus dedicating less hours to direct work with pupils.

According to the investigation proposed by Sousa & Nunes (2024), we can also understand why women receive lower pay: if those who advance in their careers are mostly men, it is their salaries that will receive increases or bonuses related to their positions. Female teachers, on the other hand, who fight for quality education with scarce resources, receive only the base salary.

Female teachers are the ones that day after day ritualize their profession. In each shift, in each class, procedures such as taking attendance, organizing the classroom into rows, handing out notebooks to students, and writing the heading, are done almost automatically. But what differentiates one teacher from another? While one performs her role in an automated way almost all the time she is in the classroom, blindly obeying the dark interests of a commodified education, the other does it with more listening, sensitivity and involved with the act of educating, creating affection and being affected by her interlocutors, like an actress performing on a stage.

Considering that, we recover the idea of education as a freedom exercise, cherished by bell hooks (2013), to reinforce that the act of *Educating* — with capital "E" — goes beyond content transmission. According to Paulo Freire (1996) *Educating* is only possible in the interaction among subjects, since nobody educates anybody and nobody is educated alone. *Educating* occurs between one individual and another. Also, *Educating* is promoting autonomy, critical thought and more liberating ways of existing in the world, recognizing the transforming power of relationships. It is in such unpredictable terrain that teachers'

³ The other two criteria are: II. The relationship with knowledge, mastering some areas to be transmitted, but not producing or being critical to the point of questioning, and IV. The symbolic representation of female teachers as knowledge transmitters.

⁴ Term used to define the physical and symbolic space where education really occurs. It is where teachers and education professionals build the knowledge base daily.



performance that goes beyond knowledge transmission is seen, it occurs between the gesture and the work, the improvised and the planned, the knowing and the becoming.

Such performing teacher, every day, creates and recreates performances to attract students' attention, but also to be in an attitude of openness before the class to both expose content and create qualitative interaction, which is sensitive and ethical with her students.

As a teacher, I particularly like using storytelling⁵. Since I was a child, reading and listening to stories were the practices that I liked most. I'm the daughter of an elementary school teacher, and I learned to listen to and make up stories when I was very young. I believe that because of such stimuli, I like telling stories to my students since in addition to reliving incredible moments, which I have already experienced, I can make the school stage my performance space. In that moment I can be myself, but I can also be whoever the story allows me to be (Teacher's account - personal collection).

And despite so many roles, teachers still have to juggle other responsibilities in the classroom: we are educators, actresses, mothers, doctors, psychologists, therapists, and this has made the teaching journey exhausting for women, who are also all of these things at home.

In other times students who had passed were released at the end of November, currently, our school calendar extends with the children attending school until December 18th, just before the end of the year, when a large part of the teaching staff is exhausted and worn out by the school routine. At the end of the year, the school (which follows the neoliberal and commercialized model) looks more like a children's warehouse, where parents leave their children because they need to work and have no one to leave them with.

School, which once was a premier learning space, nowadays seems more concerned with creating education indicators than dedicating to its *Education* action. External evaluations such as the Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica [Basic Education Index] (IDEB)⁶, do not privilege the importance of the trivial (reading and writing skills, or those related to the four basic mathematical operations – addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) and are based on indices that mask the reality of the student's learning experience, thus perpetuating the numbers of functional illiteracy⁷.

⁵ *Storytelling* is the art of telling, developing and adapting stories using specific elements — character(s), environment, conflict and a message — in events with beginning, middle and end.

⁶ IDEB was created in 2007 and gathers, in a single indicator, the results of two equally important concepts for quality education: school flow and the average of students' performances in evaluations.

⁷ According to data from the Avaliação Nacional de Alfabetização [National Literacy Evaluation], carried out by the Instituto Anísio Teixeira [Anísio Teixeira Institute] (Inep), published in 2016, 54.73% of students over 8 years old presented insufficient levels of reading, while 33.95% Brazilian students obtained insufficient results

In those moments, but not only then, we see teaching performance at its maximum intensity, that is, teachers doing more than what is expected from them, which includes instructing, listening, feeding, taking care, without neglecting their main task, namely, *Educating*. The overlap of these roles in teachers' routines results in an overload that accumulates, not only at the end of the year, but throughout the whole year. They perform the role of mothers, nannies, medical doctors and psychologists for students who arrive with extreme needs in all aspects, and then become exhausted and ill.

Other times, it is also necessary to play the role of provider, that is, to buy some school material or food since there are students who do not have school items even if the municipality usually supply these items. Many times, they pay from their own pocket so that no child is in the classroom with the minimum conditions to follow the classes, including feeding them since many families live in situations of extreme poverty and vulnerability.

Given this scenario, could considering performance in conjunction with teaching serve as a stimulus to escape the mechanization and lack of interest in basic education? By considering the different daily tactics employed by teachers, can we establish a distinction between teaching practice and performative/artistic practice?

Homework I

To better contextualize readers, we present a synthesis of how female education started in Brazil. According to Silva *Et al.* (2024), education in Brazil, since the appearance of formal education, in the mid-19th century, was structured unequally, mainly regarding female access to school, which resulted in limitations reinforcing social and gender roles, restricting women's access and participation in formal education spaces. At that time, women were offered a type of education designed to qualify them for activities related to domestic chores, such as caring for children and husbands.

Such model was so rooted into the population's minds that, according to Silva *Et al.* (2024, p. 282) “[...] the association of the teacher's role with that of mothers and the understanding that they had a docile nature and a vocation to instruct the population, enabled the acceptance of women in the teaching profession”. In those models, knowledge is

in writing, and another 54.4% were below the desirable performance in mathematics. Data extracted from: [Escolas brasileiras ainda formam analfabetos funcionais – Jornal da USP](#) (Lourenço, 2020). Access on: April 18, 2025.

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transitive and can be transmitted from one person who knows to another that is in the process of learning.

The femininity of teaching started there, a concept that reveals a qualitative idea since it matches female qualities to a certain profession. Feminization of teaching occurs in a quantitative way, that is, expressing the large number of women who represent the teaching staff in basic education. For basic levels of education, women, for higher positions, men are required. Since the 19th century, advancement in the teaching career is male as pointed out by Nogueira & Schelbauer (2007, p. 78):

[...] the education of education professionals became a relevant criterion to enter the career and obtain a vacancy in a school meant for teachers, mainly women, obtaining the maximum advancement in the career since management positions were guaranteed to male professionals.

Therefore, we understand the femininity phenomenon in teaching to deal with children in basic education – early childhood and elementary school – involving more women since they are historically associated with childhood and the characteristics of mother's care, thus directing greater attention and affection to pupils, which is expected at that level of education. However, this conception strongly marked by gender roles and a traditional view of teaching starts to be challenged over time, mainly due to social, scientific and education transformations that emerged in the 20th century.

In such context, with the technological and scientific revolution and the progressive distancing from strictly moralizing perspectives, new pedagogical approaches started to be strengthened. The notion of *constructivism*, developed by the Swedish biologist, psychologist and epistemologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980), proposes that knowledge is built by individuals in their interactions, acting in tension and giving new meanings to more traditional education conceptions and methodologies.

The Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) highlighted the role of social interactions in learning, formulating concepts such as the proximal development zone, understood as the space between what pupils can already do independently and what they cannot do without some help — that is, the place where learning effectively occurs. In his perspective, mediation is central in the teaching-learning process.

Apart from Piaget and Vygotsky, the American philosopher and educator John Dewey (1859–1952) contributed with the idea of education based on experience, thus defending an



active school connected to pupils' lives, where the education process is not limited to transmitting content, but derives from the subjects' life experiences.

In Brazil, Paulo Freire is a reference, his critical pedagogy proposes dialogical education, aimed at social awareness and transformation. Freire criticizes the traditional teaching model, which he calls banking education, in which teachers “deposit” contents into passive pupils. To oppose that traditional model, the educator proposes a type of education that challenges the world, based on dialogue, on listening and on the collective construction of knowledge, where teachers and pupils learn together from reality experienced.

In this new context, the constructivist and socio-interactionist paradigms are strengthened and teachers are not those responsible for transmitting, but rather play the role of mediators of the education process and those creating an environment that favors the experience of knowledge. In addition, the growing appreciation of interdisciplinary and the search for holistic and human education seek to articulate different areas of knowledge and to develop competencies that go beyond mastering content, thus favoring critical thinking, autonomy, sensitivity and collaboration.

As regards the incorporation of digital technologies in the education process, mainly in a scenery marked by the digital culture and the expansion of hybrid education with the use of virtual platforms, multimedia resources and active methodologies, contemporary teaching appears as a field in constant transformation, thus requiring from teachers a reflective, critical posture that is open to innovation, without neglecting their commitment to a democratic and socially referenced education.

Currently, there are more men linked to basic education; however, the female presence still prevails in the “shop floor” of school. Is that because the “floor” is the basis of the body? And in this new configuration, what is the possible space for women investing in teaching as a profession?

Homework II

After the discussion of the school routine, challenging female teachers, and some male teachers, in many different ways, we will now focus on teachers' practice as a performative practice, where the body needs to establish different degrees of relationship to prevent the collapse of the education process. At the same time, this practice seeks horizontal bonds in

the knowledge construction process. From the concept of performance and interactive reality, in the classroom, there seems to be an unfolding of the teaching function into a more performative action.

The theorist of performance Richard Schechner (2006) pointed out that restored behavior (physical and verbal actions that are present in everyday life) occurs in the interface between the conscious and the unconscious. In other words, according to that notion we are not always aware or choose rationally how we repeat certain behaviors in our everyday lives. For this reason, Schechner (2006) defines "performance" in a broad and interdisciplinary way, highlighting the term to describe different situations in areas of life and linking the term with the ability to repeat or restore some already experienced behavior (in some sphere of life), with or without planned rehearsals.

As previously said, the concept of *performance* is related to different areas of knowledge, crossing art frameworks and permeating the most varied spheres of life – such as rituals, social behavior, and political and educational events. Therefore, *being* and *doing*, as well as *showing how to do* are crucial aspects and organizers of a performance as proposed by Schechner (2006). In such context, performances are not restricted to the field of arts or business/sports/sex but might be dislocated to the school context and routine, mainly when its lenses are used to observe teachers' qualities. Qualities that tend to be incorporated as identity both inside and outside the classroom.

In this investigation, the restored behavior concept can be explained as behavior that is repeated and/or reenacted throughout one's life. This means that all performance involves the execution of actions that have already been carried out and are reinterpreted in a new context, from their presence in "here and now". In other words, restored behavior is a type of repetition that varies, it is staging.

Depending on the demands of a social event, the staging can appear in a conscious or unconscious way, it can be controlled or just flow. However, it always acts and produces specific meanings, depending on the demands of that specific social event. Such behavior is observed in several human practices, showing that all action already carried out has effect in the present, and as subjects we always act in previously set roles. However, this does not mean that there is no space for variation, reinvention and resignification of past effects in the "here and now". Taking that into account, we ask: Would then the teacher's identity be a



construction that operates both on the margin encompassing teaching actions and on the margin relating to personal actions, characteristic of other spheres of life?

To enlighten this question regarding identities, the philosopher Judith Butler (2017, p. 56) observed that “[...] there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender...identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results.” Therefore, identities and discourses about identities are part of the cultural, social and existential accumulation about them, which are apprehended and performed both voluntarily and involuntarily throughout life. They are socio-cultural subjective and material residues that become intimate when used and/or repeated. They are actions and ways of being and behaving that, over time, are restored and crystallized in subjectivities by means of the different roles that we play in the interface of human interactions.

In the core of this discussion, the concept of restored behavior appears as a central element to analyze identity and teachers’ actions in classrooms, in their coexistence with pupils or outside the classroom, as a result of their teaching experience, in their personal lives. This occurs because the education event incorporates actions that are not spontaneous or unprecedented, but rather re-enacted “always once more” in the classroom routine. These are behaviors that have been performed previously and are re-presented or reinterpreted in new contexts. Such behaviors are learned, relearned, trained, and often adjusted according to the moment, the audience, and the intention of the action.

The reflection proposed here focuses on behaviors of other spheres of life, which are incorporated in educational action. It seems relevant to mention that such behaviors can be represented in a creative and adaptive way, and used in the teaching activity, thus producing more qualitative interactions during the knowledge mediation, instruction and constructions, actions and functions in the classroom.

Therefore, we propose that the teaching action is understood as performance since it involves pedagogical routines, body gesture, different tones when speaking and communication and teaching strategies that are continuously re-presented or reinvented in each teaching situation. Also, because in the teaching activity, qualities related to care and maternity can be invoked.

In school, each lesson represents a performance. In the classroom, there are actions, behaviors, gestures and intentions that have been already previously planned, learnt, executed

and memorized, all this must be present each time, the here and how. In other words, all varies and is renewed in the presence of new teaching contexts, classes and situations. Just as actresses read the audience to better adjust their communication with it, teachers in the education actions must activate their listening to the here and how of the classroom. Like *performers*, they need to read the environment (the classroom), respond to a diverse audience (pupils in their diversity and ways of acting and behaving) and adjust their performance (ways of teaching, nuances of voice and body transformation) in a continuous dialogue with the needs of the moment and demands of learning.

In addition, the teaching practice carries ritualistic and symbolic elements that are repeated with small variations: the roll call, the beginning of the class, the presentation of the content, the exercises, and the closing comprise a scenic-pedagogical "script" structure. However, even within this script, there is much room for improvisation, creativity, and renewal, as well as for the unpredictable. Thus, the classroom transforms into a stage where knowledge is not merely transmitted mechanically, but constructed, enacted, experienced, and shared with the learners.

By applying the restored behavior concept, it becomes possible to rethink teachers' role as agents that not only teach but rather teach using mainly their body and voice for communication. This demands energy with more intensity than in other jobs, which if not given proper attention, might cause burnout and result in harm to the body. Daily and continuous exposure to noise and the need to raise one's voice frequently, places teachers in various extra-ordinary everyday behavior.

To think energy quality in the actor/actress's body, the researcher, professor of acting and theater director Eugênio Barba defines everyday behavior as that carried out through energy economy, while extra-ordinary everyday behavior is the one that requires an extra dose of energy and muscle and mental effort. According to Barba & Savarese (1990, p. 90, *our translation*),

Through the technique transmitted by tradition, or through the construction of a character, the actor reaches an artificial behavior, which is extra-ordinary everyday behavior. They broaden their presence and, consequently, broaden the audience's perception. In theater's fiction, they are body-in-life.⁸

⁸ Original: "A través de la técnica transmitida por la tradición, o a través de la construcción de un personaje, el actor llega a un comportamiento artificial, extra-cotidiano. Dilata su presencia y por consecuencia dilata la percepción del espectador. En la ficción del teatro es un cuerpo-en-vida".



In our understanding here, this extra-ordinary everyday behavior of using body energy is not only property of those acting on stage, but a way of working with presence in different public situations. In our opinion, in the classroom, there is a singular type of energy and a unique way of using body, voice and emotions, as well as one's own identity as pedagogical tools, aiming at mediating and building knowledge and teaching-learning experiences. This perspective enriches the understanding of education as a process that is not only cognitive, but also aesthetic, performative and relational.

One example that can illustrate the discussion of everyday energy and extra-ordinary everyday energy can be found in the series *Adolescence* (2024)⁹. It shows tired teachers who are almost giving up but who need to resort to extra-ordinary everyday behavior to become present in the classroom, so that their voices are heard, so that they can interact with students and mediate the educational process. At the same time, most of the students are seen to be disrespectful and disinterested. It becomes evident that in the teaching mission, for comprising specific repertoires, actions linked to teaching require from those who teach extreme levels of physical and emotional effort, which in adverse situations might make the person ill.

Obviously, there are reasons for each of these behaviors in the classroom. However, there are multiple layers that underpin such physical expressions. It is necessary to delve into each look and each small gesture and then speculate on some clues that could act as motivators or triggers for such behaviors. That said, despite so many adversities, which require timely reflection, we would like to focus this text on the discussion of the practice of teaching as performance and the classroom as a stage for those who teach.

The classroom and the role-playing

From the examples obtained in the teaching job, we set here a relationship between the concepts of performance and restored behavior to investigate identities and teachers' work. We also seek to clarify how such concepts can support the description of relations of care and sensitivity experienced by teachers in the routine of their work in classroom and in other roles they play outside the classroom, such as motherhood, for example.

⁹ British series involving crime and psychological drama, exploring themes such as juvenile violence and the impact of social networks on the life of adolescents and young adults. Launched in 2025, it is on on *Netflix*.

Confirming the classroom as a learning *locus*, Masschelein & Simons (2014) defended education as a public action. Considering that, if education is a public action, the person who *Educates* is also in a public situation and needs to realize it and react to their learners' learning difficulties and be committed and available to act in such situations. Increasingly, teachers also need to be mediators of conflicts in the classroom, and what had been planned often needs to be reformulated almost instantly, in a process of improvisation that is characteristic of the profession.

A recent example is one pupil who arrived at the school where I teach. She came from Maranhão, where she was a student in the Associação de pais e amigos dos excepcionais (APAE) [Association of parents and friends of exceptional children]. However, in the school of origin, she was classified in a regular class and school.

She arrived as a student enrolled in the fifth year, without any conditions of being studying at this level since she could not even recognize all letters of the alphabet. With some dialogue, and an attentive look into the student's family, the school staff found out that she and her family lived in a situation of extreme poverty. Her mother had six children and no job, only a continuous benefit payment, as the girl enrolled with us is entitled to receive it due to her intellectual disability (Teacher's report - private collection).

What can the school do in such a situation? It must get organized, join efforts and sympathize with them.

We put our efforts together, teachers and students, coordination and direction and collected clothes and food. We also made a point of providing that child with care and attention and do everything possible so that she could learn at least to read, and even with her specificities and difficulties, could feel included in the process (Teacher's report – private collection).

Considering a situation like the one described above, we understand that if the learner is not fed, they cannot learn or evolve. Resuming Masschelein & Simons (2014, p. 39) pointed out:

[...] The success of schooling lies, in part, in the amateurism of the teacher. Could it be that a teacher is never entirely a professional, but at least partially an amateur (someone who does it out of love)? A teacher is someone who loves their subject or topic, who cares about it and pays attention to it. Alongside this 'love for the subject,' and perhaps because of it, they also teach out of love for the student. As an amateur, the teacher is not only versed in something but also cares about it and is actively involved in it. (our translation)

The quotation above presents the school as a proper space for extra-ordinary bodily expressions. In such game between body and environment, the environment is stimulus and a



key-point suggesting that an organism can hardly exist without an environment. According to Christiane Griner (2002, p. 44) “[...] living beings and their environments are situated in relation to each other through their mutual specifications or a co-determination relation”. The classroom space is marked as a co-determined and interactive environment for providing the spaces of experience of educational action, between those playing the role of teaching and those playing the role of learning. The flavor of such interaction results from the friction and the interaction, since “[...] the idea is to map possible body anatomies, their respective functions and actions in the world. Finally, they are understood in an inseparable way and from their ways of organizing themselves” (Greiner, 2002, p. 18, our translation).

The co-dependence that might occur between teachers and pupils, or even between performers and audience, can be described in parts regarding its similarities and differences. Obviously, some differences can be noticed in the experience of an actress in front of her audience and a teacher in front of her students. However, some similarities are undeniable and have already been described above.

But what really draws attention in the classroom is the richness of experiences and the exercise of self-perception and the perception of others, emancipation and individual and collective liberation, which is stimulated by the teachers’ commitment. About such relationship, Sandra Corazza (2021, p. 5, our translation) advocates “[...] teaching as vital power, that is, as a form of existence, ability to persist, intertwined with certain sadness and awe for small joys”. Joy appears in every gesture of affection that pupils present or in their small/great achievements. According to Tardif (2002, p. 56, our translation),

Experience knowledge is neither transmitted via formal education situations, nor acquired solely by means of study or reading. It is built over time, from everyday practice and the interactions the teacher establishes with their environment, their pupils, their colleagues, and the concrete teaching situations.

Conversely, sadness appears when the relationship is interrupted or devalued. Aiming to recover the dignity of the teaching job, either for love or respect, by both the action and the person who works as an educator, better conditions must be created so that *Educating* and the teaching-learning action can be fully developed. Without due care, the school space might become harmful, violent, and result in human experience which is not related to freedom, and one that deviates from the main objectives of education work. According to hooks (2013, p. 25),



To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin practice.

Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-1677) was concerned with the body and the mind, and how not to dissociate one from the other. According to the philosopher (2002, p. 71, our translation), “[...] the mind and the body are one and the same individual” and, therefore, inseparable, being affected by “[...] an external nature, insofar as an external body determines the human body in a definite way” (Spinoza, 2002, p. 73, our translation). This implies perceiving that the human body is a machine moved by externally perceived forces. And the external force that moves the teacher's body is the satisfaction of seeing her student progress. According to Givigi (2019, p. 403),

Approximately three and a half centuries separate us from Spinoza, and yet his words seem to refer directly to the dilemmas we experience in the present. His affirmative conception of life in its incessant, immanent productivity, as well as the forcefulness of his critique of the foundations of modern thought in its very dawn, makes his ideas indispensable tools for thinking about the crisis of these same paradigms today, as well as for building alternatives to the problems that affect us daily. (our translation)

After 25 years as a teacher, I increasingly see the responsibility of the family being delegated to the school. And who is the school? It is me and my colleagues, it is the students who arrive without limits or encouragement, many of them even lacking the conditions to learn. In short, in an extremely feminine environment, where women are the majority, as in early childhood and elementary schools, the teachers are also mothers. Mothers of their own children and of other people's children.

In a closer setting, we see tired women at school, their bodies weary, aching, exhausted, because they are also wives, they perform household chores (and are also students). And the grueling schedule to which the system has subjected us, with senseless demands, diagnostic tests that in many cases demonstrate little educational effectiveness, all this make us sick.

The state and families, by outsourcing the function of transmitting values and education to their children to a telephone or the internet, underestimate the power of school and encourage an educational crisis. Let us remember that the situations portrayed in the



British series *Adolescence* (2024) are not happening only in fiction. We see children, adolescents, and young people connected to a network that encourages them to dehumanize relationships. Behind a cell phone or computer, these young people are capable of acts that have led this generation to chaos. And when the virtual world and the real world intersect and collide, many do not know how to deal with repressed emotions. And the school, which is still made of concrete walls, cement floors, and school desks, needs to learn how to deal with this increasingly roboticized clientele.

To try and escape this unstimulating scenario, once again we have to be performative: taking care of everything, everyone, except ourselves, until the day the teacher cannot take it anymore and her body gives up and she ends up in the hospital. Acom & Colling (2019, p. 131, our translation), supported by Goellner (2015), states that: “[...] the body is the effect of a pedagogical process, which teaches ways of being and behaving. The school, as well as religion, the media, medicine, law and other spaces of socialization, are responsible for shaping bodies”.

The situation we see in schools is one of numerous absences, due to physical or mental diseases. More teachers have been removed from their activities and placed in positions that are not relevant to their area of expertise. There are more indicators and numbers to be met, which do not necessarily match the reality of our schools. The digital platforms imposed, which should support the teaching learning process, usually hamper teachers’ work since they are not used to enrich classes, but rather to generate statistics.

May we put into practice within our institutions the much-idealized "pedagogy of the commons," which is based on the integration of community and popular education, where the experiences of social groups are valued. In this way, we will certainly have fewer people who are ill, both in body and soul. As observed by Givigi (2019, p. 416, our translation),

From what has been exposed above, we might think that such pedagogy of the commons, based on power, sensitivity and generosity, just like social life in general, is easier to conceive than to find. But this is, in any case, the very challenge of a pedagogy conceived from Spinoza's ethics, where it is said that the path leading to beatitude is as difficult as it is rare. Otherwise, says Spinoza, how can it be explained that this path is neglected by almost everyone?

The time has come to turn to what is important, to return to the time when school was a "living school," a space that, according to the Greeks, was in itself a place of connection with pleasure, with leisure, with encounter, with dialogue (Takuá, 2022). We need to focus on



deconstructing the school, which according to the same author, is a place full of order, control and obedience, that is, psychological torture. We need a thinking school serving the community, which does not make students and teachers ill.

However, combining the concept of performance to teacher practice is an invitation to turn the lesson into a game, with intimate physicality, enacted in the everyday routine, in scenes and acts where glances, silences, laughter, and tears are part of the action of teaching, learning, telling, seeing, and hearing stories and bodily narratives of oneself and of the other with whom one interacts. Considering that, teaching ceases to be an instructive and mechanical action, becoming instead a process of witnessing the time and space of the construction of this other.

It is in the here and now that teaching takes on its nuances, discourse and practice overlap, and the classroom becomes the locus of ritual. In this place, the clear boundaries between life and profession become porous or diluted, and the most intimate and sensitive aspects manifest themselves during the public act of *Educating*. Thus, according to the previously cited Belgian professors, teachers are like artists, and they move through different places in the social structure.

In the routine of a classroom, this means that there is a boundary or a porous space between teachers' personal and professional lives. Aspects that, at first glance, seem separate, tend to converge in the classroom setting. This is especially relevant in teaching, a profession marked by a strong emotional charge, intense interpersonal relationships, and a profound connection between who one is and what one does.

The teaching job is not limited to the accomplishment of technical tasks (planning lessons, correcting tests, etc.). It involves values, affections, beliefs and ideologies. This means that teachers do not "switch off" when their workday ends. They keep thinking about students, projects, institutional problems, injustice in the education system, etc., especially because the time allocated within the school for preparing lessons and grading tests and assessments, as well as the lessons to be taught, is insufficient. The allocated time for preparation and grading is not enough to handle so many demands. We observe, then, that the professional identity of a teacher is constructed from their own life trajectory, experiences, and relationships.



It is in this landscape that teachers are recognized even outside the school or the university, in social networks, cultural events and everyday encounters. This reinforces the idea that teachers' identity transcends institutional space and intertwines with life. Thus, the teacher's presence in the classroom and even in society functions like that of a performing artist, who appropriates their own body as a relational element. This public visibility can generate an expectation of constant conduct, discourse, and positioning, as if the teacher could never "step out of the role." She "is" a teacher, not just "works" as a teacher.

Emotional involvement with students and the challenges of the education system means that teachers carry with them the pains and triumphs of the classroom. The profession demands empathy, listening, and presence – human qualities that are employed at an affective level and are vital impulses for education. Often, teacher burnout is linked not only to work overload but also to mechanical repetition and a lack of playfulness in the classroom. Teaching, especially in schools with limited resources, requires a high degree of self-management, that is, teachers need to organize their workload, seek training, take care of their mental health, and seek self-realization in their work.

For this reason, classroom time and space are fundamental to establish creative relationships, promoting affective bonds between educators and learners. It is essential that the time and space of the classroom be used to establish creative relationships, promoting affective bonds between educators and students. This is because the relationship persists outside the school space and invades intimate and social life. The temporality between work hours and free time dissolves – work “invades” their home, weekends, and vacations.

Therefore, understanding teaching as performance means recognizing that teaching implies revealing oneself, affecting and being affected, deconstructing oneself while rebuilding oneself with the other. It is admitting that, amidst routines, pressures, and educational policies, often inconsistent with school reality, there is a body that feels, creates, and resists to sustain the public act of *Educating*. Reclaiming the school as a living, powerful, and community space means placing sensitivity, ethics, and generosity at the center of the practice that permeates the encounter between teachers and students. May we, therefore, demand dignified and humane working conditions, so that educational action continues to be, despite everything, a territory of life, creation, and potential – and not of illness. Recognizing the teacher as a performer of her own existence is to reaffirm that education only flourishes



when it embraces the body, the history, and the voice of both those who teach and those who learn.

Closing the curtains

From the reflections developed in this article, we understand that thinking teaching as performance is not only about a conceptual displacement, but rather a deep change in the way of perceiving teachers' work. By recognizing that teaching involves body, voice, emotion and presence, we displace the idea of teaching as a strictly technical field towards a sensitive, relational and aesthetic field where knowledge is built in interaction (among individuals), in encounter and shared experience.

Autoethnography, as a methodological choice, has proven powerful in highlighting the subjective layers that permeate teaching practice. By articulating personal experience and critical analysis, we could demonstrate that teaching is not limited to institutional protocols, but is also constituted from memories, affections, tensions, and resistances. In this sense, writing about oneself not only narrates but also produces knowledge, opening cracks in hegemonic discourses that attempt to homogenize the educational experience.

Throughout the text, we highlighted that teaching, mainly in basic education, is crossed by gender markers that impact directly on work conditions and the professionals' health. Feminization of teaching, historically built, continues to witness structural inequalities, such as work overload, professional undervaluation and limited career advancement. Thus, understanding teaching as performance also implies recognizing that those bodies who teach are gendered and crossed by social expectations that broaden their responsibilities inside and outside of the school.

In this scenario, teachers' performance appears as a survival strategy and possibility of creation. By considering different repertoires – pedagogical, affective, bodily and cultural – teachers reinvent their practice every day, transforming the classroom into a space of experimentation. Such performative performance does not eliminate the harsh work conditions but reveals their ability to reinvent themselves in the teachers' work.

Thinking of teaching as performance in the current context is fundamental because the teaching model based on knowledge transmission became obsolete in face of the easy access to knowledge and the need for engagement of all participants in the education process both in



physical and virtual environments. Therefore, performative teaching places teachers as mediators, who use their bodies, voice (without having to demonstrate authority in an aggressive way and without affective interaction as in the model adopted in the past) and presence to turn the lesson into a “pedagogical event”.

The notion of restored behavior contributes significantly to the understanding of how teachers’ practices are built. While gestures, routines and structures are repeated, there is also variation, adaptation and creation. Each lesson, even if structured as a recognizable script, is updated in the encounter with learners, their demands, their histories, and their ways of being in the world. In this game between repetition and difference, teaching occurs as a living practice.

In addition, by approximating teaching from performing arts, we broaden the understanding of the use of body and energy in the education process. The demands of intensified presence, many times close to what is defined as extra-ordinary behavior, highlights the level of physical and emotional wearing implied in the “pedagogical event”. This perception reinforces the need for public and institutional policies that take into account the bodily and affective dimension of the teachers’ work, thus guaranteeing more dignifying work conditions.

Another central point refers to the broadening of functions ascribed to schools and, consequently, to teachers. As previously discussed, the school space has taken over responsibilities that go beyond formal education, incorporating functions of care, social assistance and conflict mediation. This accumulation of roles, despite revealing the school power as a welcoming space, also contributes to the intensification of teachers’ overload, mainly in contexts of social vulnerability.

Therefore, the model of school that we have and the one that we desire must be rethought. The critique to a neoliberal model of education, focusing on indicators and quantitative results, points to the need for rescuing a school that is committed to the holistic education of individuals. A living school that values the encounter, the listening, the learning time and the particularities of each learner.

The proposal of a pedagogy of the commons appears as a possible horizon. By valuing collective experience, local knowledge and community relations, this perspective opens space for a more democratic and inclusive education. This is about recognizing that



knowledge is not only in formal curricula, but also in the experiences shared in the school context.

Resuming teaching as an ethical, aesthetic and political practice also implies recognizing the centrality of affection in the education process. Teaching is, before anything else, establishing relationships. Such relationships require listening, availability and commitment to others. Therefore, teaching performance is not only a teaching strategy, but rather a way of being in the world, of being committed to reality and acting in its transformation.

Finally, we insist that understanding teaching as performance is also a gesture of resistance. In a context marked by precariousness, illnesses, and professional devaluation, recognizing teachers' creation power is stating the importance of their work and presence. It is to recognize that, despite adversities, there is vibrant life in the classroom.

Therefore, we conclude that teaching when understood in its performative dimension is revealed as a fertile soil for creation, reflection and transformation. It is a space where teaching and learning intertwine, where the body speaks, experience is shaped and education occurs, not as mechanical repetition, but as a living, sensitive and deep human action.

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