

Teacher authority in the modern era: Questioned pedagogical act

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The lack of teacher's valorization policies is a recurrent hallways discussion among teachers at Brazilian schools, and it reflects student's indiscipline, questioning educator authority. Historically, the subject of lack of educator authority is a movement originated by different problems, and its root is the decadence of institutions. The research "Teacher authority in the modern era: questioned pedagogical act" was developed as part of doctorate project in a public university in Salvador-BA, Brazil, and it aims to analyze the teacher's authority in the modern era and its implications in the pedagogical act. Qualitative approach research was used as method model, assisting in understanding and interpreting the acts of the studied subjects. Case study was used to analyze the phenomenon in its depth, given the complexity of each volunteer. The research was conducted in a big public estate school localized in downtown Salvador-BA, Brazil. The data was collect using observation, semi-structured interview and conversation with six last year of elementary teachers. For the data analysis and interpretation, descriptive and interpretative categories of the three instruments will be analyzed through the French speech analysis method, considering the explicit and implicit in the speech.

We are presenting a part of this research, trying to question and discuss the ambivalence of the docent statute, that in determinated and different context, are developed as acts of (des)authorization, and for that we started with the comprehension of the authority concept based in Kojève(2006) and Arendt(2010). Authority presumes recognition, in other words, the one that has authority needs another to legitimate it, which is why it's important to remember the fact that authority isn't given through individual, but always is social. (KOJEVE, 2006). Arendt (2010,2011) emphasizes that maybe given negative way that authority is built, because it doesn't use coercion or force, the author theorizes that violent or tiranic acts differ from authority only because of the freewill. In the educational scope, the discussion of teacher's authority brings the need to think the place and position occupied by the teacher in the educational and social scenario, because the most prominent discussion is that this place has been poorly occupied, revealing that something was lost along the way. (CEREZER, OUTEIRAL, 2011) In this scenario, it's necessary to think about what is behind empty authority place that is found in different institutions. Our goal is that our investigation brings reflexion to why some teachers, despite the lack of educational and social context, authorize themselves in pedagogical acts, transforming the learning and teaching in transforming experiences, while other, resempting a desauthorizing process, make their classes empty moments. What is implied in their curricular and formation grade of the former that make it possible their differentiated practice?

Keywords: educator authority, modern era, pedagogical act.

Introduction

This article has as its main goal to analyze the teacher's authority in the modern era and its implications in the pedagogical act. It's a part of an ongoing doctorate research, qualitative approach research was used as method model, assisting understanding and interpreting the acts of the studied subjects. Case study was used to analyze the phenomenon in its depth, given the complexity of each volunteer. The research was conducted in a big public estate school localized in downtown Salvador-BA, Brazil. The volunteers were three men and three women. The data was collected using observation, semi-structured interview and conversation. For the data analysis and interpretation, descriptive and interpretative categories of three instruments will be analyzed through the French speech analysis method, considering the explicit and implicit in the speech, based from different theoretical contributions, which falls in the intersection of a set of social sciences knowledge that has its assumptions based on historical materialism, language and psychoanalysis.

The object probes the look at the development on the teacher profession in the postmodern context, looking for unveiling the idiosyncrasies that conduct the pedagogical act when it comes to the teacher authority in the modern era. For that, the research was systematized in two sessions. The first session, entitled **Thoughts about the concept of authority and modernity**, has as purpose discussing the authority concept relating with the modern vision of the world. It has as source Kojève (2006), Arendt (2010, 2011), Bauman (2011) and others. The concept of authority explored here, refers that the one who has authority will need the other to legitimate it, that's why it's necessary to pay attention for the fact that the authority is not individual, but is always social (Kojève, 2006). Thereby, violent and tyrannical acts differ from authority, affirms Arendt (2011), only through freedom of choice is possible talking about authority. But, what Arendt announces is that authority is in crisis in the modern era, this crisis happens in political and pre-political areas, such as family, church and school. In turn, the world's modernization project in the West, intensified by the development of the consumption capitalism and marked by transformations of mass communication and transport technologies, takes proportions never seen in the last fifty years, operating new time and space dimensions, and changing the social connections.

The second session entitled **Teacher authority and the pedagogical act in the modern era**, proposes thinking the fracture of teaching in the pedagogical act, from the reflection about two fields that mix: the educational and the social. In this way, highlights the historical compositions that encourage the teacher (des)authorization. The debate in a matter has as its core the why of some teachers authorize themselves in invested pedagogical acts turning the learning and teaching in ever changing experiences, while others resentful teachers by a (des)authorization process are frequently interrogated in the class act, making these moments empty of meaning. What is implied in their curricular and formation grade of the former that make it possible their differentiated practice?

Thoughts about the concept of authority and modernity

To think about the concept of authority through the modern logic background requires first to observe multiples historical meaning that this word had. Authority can be defined by a person, i.e. the individual that have power or control, or can be understood by a place occupied by someone that enforces it, implying competency, influence and acknowledgement. ("Academia Portuguesa de Letras, 2001:431) Kojève (2006) says that "authority's act is

always thoughtful and free". (p.35) He also says that authority needs an action, i.e. there is only authority in those who embrace it, therefore it is "[...] it's active, not passive." (p.36) Arendt (2011) wrote a chapter about the question "What is authority?" (p.127), initially suggesting that "[...] should've been a safer title: What was – not what is – authority?" (p.127) The author discusses the authority phenomenon, highlighting that during authority's crises during modern ages is due to its political nature, extending to the school. When correlating the education's problem to the authority crises, Arendt (2011) says that the latter is related to the tradition's crisis, and both authority and tradition are implied in education's nature.

Authority's crisis in the education system is strictly connected to the tradition's crisis... It's very difficult to the educator to deal with this modern society crisis, because their job is to serve as a mediator between the old and new, and their profession requires an extraordinary respect to the past. (Arendt 2011:243-244)

Arendt emphasize that teaching relies in the past, and it's the teacher job to translate this cultural and social universe to reality. The political question that emerges is to identify "who governs who? Power, strength, authority, violence –they are nothing more than words that indicate the way a man govern the other." (Arendt, 2010:27) she also says that authority is not done through coercion or force. The author also says that violent or tyrannical acts differ from authority. Violence undermines the other, where there is no choice, because it uses physical force or other to the subordinate people to the one's desire.

School and family are pre-political areas. They are considered stable traditional models, but absorbed transformations from historical and social events through uncertain times. In the center of the new configuration of modern era are the liquidity (Bauman, 2011), the shallowness, the joy, the spectacular, the narcissism, among other. This movement expands to society, and is also seen in the school, changing the relationship between teachers, students and knowledge, the curriculum and the pedagogical practices. However, those transformations, that modify the structure time/space and start to produce new net of relationship, bring some theories that may mean the modernity end. Bauman (2001) believe that this theory is premature, because the contemporaneous society maintains the obsession for a modernization that has not ended. In his view, the modernity is changing from a solid to a liquid phase, represented and named by different ways like: pos-modern condition, pos-modernity and contemporaneity.

Among this group of transformations, Dufour (2005) theorizes about the world desymbolization (2005), saying that "today, men are asked to get rid of all symbolic weight that used to guarantee their exchanges. The symbolic value is dismembered, to the advantage of the neutral and simple monetary value of the product". (p. 13) The author theorizes about living in this globalizing neoliberal universe, where product exchange rise to a major need, detached from their symbolic values. When discussing the concept of desymbolization of the world, Dufour (2005) emphasizes that this situation imposed by the capitalism is rooted to ideas "[...] of fluidity, transparency, circulation and renovation that can not harmonize with historic weight of those cultural values". (p.200) In other words, the ethical, moral and cultural values do not belong to this new model, because they do not have a market value. The author says that this new capitalism state make a new type of person, who is not a critic subject anymore (Kant), neither is the psychotic subject (Freud), but is a noncritical subject.

Pereira (2011) says that "the view of authority is, this way, deconstructed to the point to undermine the bad, to feed the violence, given this demoralizing state and absence of ideals." (p.59) O author also discuss about these new

configurations constructed in the backstage of an era marked by the immediate, the urgency, the appearance and consequently by the speech of complete happiness that can be found in colorful aisles inside different size containers, depending on how much one can afford to pay for. Here is where we find the center of the complexity of our problem, because the process of desymbolization of the world highly affects the authority of the teacher, of the school and of the other institutions. In fact, a new *modus operandi* is born within the society, generated by the capitalist logic, making it a challenge to identify how to operate the thinking of contemporaneous authority the continuously *scape* in a transversal form in these two settings: social and pedagogical.

School and social fields: teacher's authority questioned

The paths taken so far illustrate that the phenomenon of teacher's authority is intricately related to the social and school fields, and it is its complexity. This issue incurred in the school's intramurals is interrelated, correlated of the authority fracture in modern, as Arendt (2011) contextualizes, We are historically constituted through a social project in which capital is raised to the maximum level of exploitation. At the heart of this process, as it was already said in this article, we see a shift of authority from the experience of modernity, shrouded in contradictions and ambiguities, it watches the utopian dream of order, control and the absolute certainties being dissolved. (Bermam, 2007)



Diagram 1

Diagram 1 shows the school field inserted in the social field, suffering direct interference from economic, political, cultural and social in a diachronic and synchronic way. However, the specifics of school field distinguishes it from other fields, because it is governed by communicational logic, that is given in a process where different people play different roles. Ferreira (2007) says that "schools are complex spaces of social interaction for excellence. They are spaces of relation and communication. Schools are made of people who play different roles.." (p. 221) In this sense, the author affirms that the relational and communicational features of this space, whose protagonists should share languages, affections and experiences in their daily life. In the

speech of the participant teachers of this research, we heard from them a defense dialogue in the relationship with the students avoiding the authoritarianism. But, in their classes, we saw that this perception sometimes appeared confused or even contradictory. In this article, we took as reference to interrogate the teacher's authority in the modern era, two participant teachers of this research.⁶⁶

The authority crisis is in the middle of social changes that the mass society has suffered, this crisis reflects a lot of questions that mix and agree to the lack of authority. When we highlight the (des)authorization question, they showed difficulties in the pedagogical act, pointing that this phenomenon increasingly present in the school field. Beyond the questions that contribute to the aggravation of this situation, we find the conceptual mess between

⁶⁶ The first teacher, a man, Teacher A (TA), teaches English in the high school, he is around his 45 years old, works for 22 years, always organized his classroom in a circle, and had a democratic speech as in the interview. The second teacher, a woman, Teacher C(TC), teaches history, is 36 years old, and her speech was very open-minded and committed to the social causes.

authoritarianism and authority, through teacher's speeches. During the empirical research, the participant teachers talk in their speech the commitment with democracy and their student's autonomy, but, when questioned about teacher's authority, the teacher **A** affirms: "I think that the teacher is the adult in the relationship. The teacher is the authority in the classroom. Authoritarianism is when you say shut up because I own here, in my class I practice the dialogue with the students". (TA) We see that the teacher **A** understands the dialogue as a basic element to the teacher's authority, and at the same time that marks the difference between authority and authoritarianism. In the notes taken at this teacher's classroom, we watched the constant investment in the ethical and relational posture, but in some groups of this teacher he couldn't keep a place and position of authority in the classroom, the noise of side conversations and jokes, as the use of cellphone and the insistent exits and entrances in the classroom needed an intervention of the teacher: "Have you heard the expression, 'following like sheep?' I'm not liking your behavior. I bring you an important deal. The jokes went too far. Let's get mature, ok? So, let's go." (TA) The students answered shaking their heads, others just laughed, but after some minutes they came back to the previous behavior. What called us the attention, first was the teacher's posture, whose words sounded like a cry, and next he continued with the oral correction of the exercise. It seemed that in fact there wasn't no time to hear about the lack of interest and attention about what was being proposed. Of course, the malaise of the teacher was clear, in a futile attempt to sustain an authority that eluded him. Some questions emerged from these scenes. Why does in some groups he could strengthen ties and build a democratic space of listening and speaking, sensing his place in the pedagogical act? And why does in the hardest groups, where the dialogue and the listening were so indispensable, he couldn't keep a place of authority? What about the relationship teacher-student; student-knowledge, seeing that in a determined group the teacher separates the planned content, and in other groups he can't even communicate? Those questions makes us to think that the teacher's authority isn't something so simple. In the speech of teacher **A**, the (des)authorization is linked to the social field. "The classroom is a continuity of what's out there. The (des)authorization goes through the lack of a harder dialogue, or preestablished rules in a didactic contract". (TA) The teacher **A** speaks about a didactic contract, but this is only possible in a reciprocity perspective way. (Francisco, 1999; Aquino, 2014). In the classroom, with the hardest groups, he couldn't make this contract happen, because it can't be build in just one way, it has to be a two-way agreement. This contractual relation requires implication, availability, commitment, leadership, responsibility, competence, knowledge from the ones involved and it has to be build, and legitimated by those involved. But what happens when the basis of this contract aren't agreeing? Of course that this contract loses its validity. Talking about the didactic contract, it must be implicit in the teacher's part, the worry about the content, methodology, the construction of a relational ethical environment, responsibility and commitment, and when that doesn't happen, the teacher breaks fundamental aspects that put in a doubt the teacher's authority. (Francisco, 1999)

In other way around, the construction of the contract based in a reciprocity relation, remember us of a pair relation, like brothers in the same position. Pereira (2008) and Aquino (2014) summon to think that equal position put to teachers in the core of that relationship. Pereira points that the pedagogical discourse, in a modern inspiration, has been insisting in reducing or extinguish the differences between teachers and students, "[...] masters and disciples are seen as similars, almost in the same condition" (2008:166) But, at the same time is also asked to transmit culturally organized knowledge, that requires from this teacher the occupation of a different place. Aquino, says that before the authority was sustained by an empty speech that required obedience and respect, "now the advent of simetrical communicational practices, gives them the right to speak it would have operated irreversible consequences on the exchanges diagram between school partners". (2014:44) Both actors talk about questions that

have generated bifurcations within the teaching (des)authorization, if in one hand we have in the classroom a relationship of two brothers, or between two symmetrical pairs, what place does the teacher is in this *locus*? Aquino bets in an asymmetric relation and affirms that “teachers and students are distinguished primarily by the initiation time in a field of knowledge and, consequently, the degree of complexity about this discursive field” (2014:64) This asymmetric relation, demands that the teacher and the students to take the starring role, building an ambient where is possible the cooperation, respect and reciprocity, without forget that this is also a stress field, conflicts and clashes. We dare affirming that this question seems to be one of the main points of the questioned authority in the modern era. The way that the teacher realizes the confrontation of ideals, the lack of interest of the students, or even how solve the problems in the classroom are fundamental elements to make the teacher’s authority happen.

However, what we observed is that for a large number of teachers, the contemporary pedagogical act have become a battle field, a field of antagonistic forces, where nobody knows who is who. In this union, the (des)authorization makes present. There are a lot of factors that contribute for this process. Some authors, as Esteves (1999); Pereira, Paulino e Franco (2011) describe some of those, like: conditions of work; changes in the teacher-student relations, contradictions of the teaching practice; disbelief in the school as social promoter; social value of the profession; change of the subject schedules and the fragmentation of teacher’s work; the new challenge of teaching practice and advancement of TIC’S in the educational environment. While we hear from teachers part of this research, the lack of structure and the dissonance of the school with technology seems to be an obstacle that somehow they say that step in the (des)authorization. The teacher C reveals the inadequate physical structure and shows how the lack of teaching resources compete to derail the classes, committing the schedule.

“I have a school tha doesn’t walk side by the society changes, with the technological era, I have a school where the boy has internet in his cellphone, but I still work with a whiteboard and a pen everyday, and sometimes the ink’s pen ends and I have no ink at the moment to fill it, then I go, I come back to the class and I can’t do the job I wanted because I no longer have ink. “(TC)

Beyond the aspects said above as being an impasse in this process, we can’t forget that the curricular issues, that involves decontextualized content and meaningless for the student, inadequate methodologies and an evaluation system that the priority is the test for a training and evaluation are factors that also contribute to the (des)authorization of teaching. Thus, the teachers complain about indiscipline, lack of interest and violence of the students, they speak about the impossibility of educating in these new times. About this question, Esteves affirms that the reality of the teachers in this situation “is comparable to a group of actors, wearing costumes of a determinated time, and when suddenly with no advice the scenary changes half the stage, showing a new landscape, different from the last scenary. A new post modern, and colored staging that covered that classic and severe scenary” (1999:97) The author’s words are a metaphor about teaching practices that does not follow the social, political, technological and cultural transformations in the same intensity. Considering that a lot of school schedules in the school have no context, without the contemporary issues, making it inadequate, following an embrittlement of the speech, that loses its sense in front of the new crowd, explaining what Esteves wrote. The teachers heard in this research express this paradox.

Obviously, those questions contribute to the indiscipline, the lack of interest and the embrittlement of teacher’s authority. However, we’re gonna make a digression, using the story about the lack of ink for the work, said by the

Teacher **C**. Often we witnessed in universities or technological courses, resources that don't work, leaving the teacher without the material available to teach. It has happened, more than once, we seeing teachers dismissing the class, caliming the impossibility to develop their work, because they don't have resources. On the other hand, we also saw teachers in the same situation, but with the *plan B*, to accomplish the didactic contract with their students. Back to the teacher **C**, we see that she resents about not having the adequated structural conditions to develop her teaching act, besides her committed speech to the " I think that today is necessary to work with a project, technology, working with youth leadership is what she has conditions to do." (TC) In the observed classes, we saw that the teacher **C** knows her students, is committed to her job and looks for speaking the students language, but the class has an informality air that drew our attention. During the classes, while the teacher explained the subjects, we saw some students using their cellphone all the time, other sitting with their back to the teacher, the dispersion, the noise, attitudes that seem to be against teacher's authority. The teacher **C** stops in some moments, calls the attention, but the student's behavior repeats. She says that "As the student grow up, the school does not matches what he would like to do, or what he think he has to do, the school does not see the student as he is." (TC) In this teacher's vision is the school field that does not looks and listens to the student, and as the student isn't noticed, he reacts with neglect, indiscipline and indifference in the class, and then teacher and student does not take center stage in the school field. In this logic, the automatic repetition of the school's schdule and the (im)possibility to build an environment where the learning act has sense to the student, are questions that interfere in the teacher's authority maintanance, and ultimately influence the desire to teach and learn. The teacher **C** refers to school in third person, as it didn't belong to the space. We know that authority requires occupying a social builded place. (Aquino, 1999; Cerezer e Outeiral, 2011). But it happens that this place and the position taken by the teacher in the educational and social fields have been precariously occupied, revealing something that got lost in this road.(Cerezer, Outeiral, 2011). Listening teacher **C**'s words, it's clear that she has a political dimension of this place, she says "I have some classes that I need to hear from the student what is going wrong. When the teacher doesn't supports that, he'll have problems from the first to the last day. Each group, each class that I teach, is going to give me the answer od what I can work with or not" (TC) Voltolini (2011:40) says that "educators strive to recover the meaning and consequently the value of education, but all of this is inefficient, since the problem is not teaching, but anthropological" The problem of meaningless education is connected to a set of experiences that question the man and his own humanity. When we hear the teacher **C** speaking about a determinated class group: "So, you're doing your job and the days are finishing to the end of the semester. I've worked at a school that I had the sensation that they didn't understand a word from the beggining to the end, and that also didn't make any difference for them." You may say that teacher's work and school are losing the sense, just as other institutions losing authority in these uncertain times. In our understanding, the lose of authority is directly related with the social function of the school, that's why, it's necessary to ask again: Wich school do we want? Wich students do we want to have? In wich social project is this school in? Who is this studente? Who is this teacher? In the same way, it's urgent to add new formulations: What does this student want? What does this teacher want? What are the resources that the teacher has to deal with this student?

Understanding the complexity of teacher's authority in the modern era, is only possible when the school field meets the social field, as it was showed in the diagram 01. Therefore, it is possible to conjecture some possibilities where teachers can put themselves as agents of action, based on ethical alignment between the world and the act, because it takes the risk of listening to the perpetuation of the non-sense ones. But, it's important to remember that this word isn't alone, it is inscribed in a relational perspective, that's why it also supposes speaking, listening and

action of other protagonists: students, children and citizens. Through this line, we agree with Ornellas (2013) when says that “listening is breaking the inside walls of the school, in the relationships with the teacher with himself, with the other and with the environment” (p.28) Taking these lines, it is required to (re)create the school, its curriculum and teaching practice, considering its relational logic, in which people could build a space where it is possible to invest in listening and speaking. Who knows, that this way, the contemporary teacher may get his place in the teaching act, and then can invest in his students sharing knowledge fulfilled with sense. Understanding then, through this way that teacher’s authority can be recognized and legitimated.

Final considerations

In the course of this article, we saw that the authority includes the understanding of a busy place by an agent sustained on ethical principles and technical political powers enabling some recognition. It is not any place, but a place and a position consisted of a subject enrolled in a family environment, in training courses, in professional development engendered in the bonds of the society. The observations of high school teachers, subjects of this research, there are many situations that advertise the scourge where elementary school is located, where the desire to learn and teach live in a confused way with the regulations of a universalizing curriculum, which often does not respond to a specific context. Teachers try to assert their status as responsible for the transmission, but the student shows a presence absence in many ways, whether in cell phone use, going to the bathroom, in conversations, or the unfocused look that signals no longer to be there. The teacher, pretends not to see the surrounds movement in the class, and so the teaching time is gone, it also running with the remnants of teaching authority.

In the investigation that gave support to this article, which is currently at the data analysis stage, we saw that the weakness of authority is not a teaching prerogative, but is a social construct which according to Arendt (2011) it was marked from the insertion in modernity and covers pre-political institutions such as school and family. The pedagogical act has been an expression of this process of (des)authorization, because it is the place where the mastery has been succumbed by the lack of an social and school discourse that allows the teacher. The new times with its contradictions, ambivalence and insecurity, embody the silence of the students, indiscipline, the boredom of a body piece left in a chair, in the homeworks they didn’t do, in the distant view emptied of desire for teaching and learning. In this (des)authorizaion discourse, it is not difficult to find many teachers lamenting the hardships of the proefession, tending to victimization. During out experience as a professional in primary school, a line of teachers called us attention because it was repeated in a timely manner to mark the dissatisfaction with some routing. *“When I close my classroom’s door, it is just me and my students”* In this phrase, spoken by many teachers, we realize that the denial in this situation produces a certain kind of a fractured teaching in his authority, devoidd of its political role and consequently verberates in the curriculum developed in the pedagogical act dailyIt is important to say that the interrogated authority is hinged to a complex set of factors, including: social, psychological and training. But, we should not forget that in this roaming, the steps come from a subject consisted of drives, whose latent contents and its manifest inscribe it on the (des)authorization and authorization route, in a continuous movement, just like life.

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