



## Practices of resistance of students in a public school: another possibility regarding indiscipline and learning 'gap'

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper aims to analyze practices of resistance of students against the effects of hegemonic power relations present in a public school. The analysis has taken the post-structuralist theoretical field as a reference, by understanding, in accordance with Foucault, that wherever there are power relations, there are also resistance practices, which are never exterior to power; on the contrary, the resistance practices occur in the very place where there are power relations. From this perspective, both power relations and resistance practices are productive and have potency for creation and transformation. Through the analysis of interviews with teachers and observation of students, we show that what the school regards as unruly behavior and a gap in learning the contents of the curricular proposals may also be seen as students' practices of resistance to the homogeneity required by the school. Such resistance movements enable the creation of spots of tension, fissures, destabilization and transformation in the instituted power relations. Hence, we regard the school context beyond the control and normalization devices, i.e. the school becomes a privileged place for freedom practices.

**Keywords:** indiscipline; power relations; freedom practices.

## Práticas de resistência de alunos em uma escola pública: uma outra possibilidade de ver a indisciplina e a 'defasagem' de aprendizagem

**RESUMO.** Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar práticas de resistência que alunos/as desenvolvem contra os efeitos das relações de poder vigentes em uma escola pública. A análise toma como referência o campo teórico pós-estruturalista, entendendo-se com Foucault que, onde há relações de poder, há práticas de resistência e que estas nunca se encontram em relação de exterioridade ao poder; ao contrário, as práticas de resistência ocorrem ali mesmo onde há relações de poder. Nesta perspectiva, tanto as relações de poder quanto as práticas de resistência são produtivas e têm um potencial de criação e transformação. Por meio da análise de entrevistas com professores/as e da observação dos/as alunos/as, mostramos que aquilo que a escola entende como comportamento indisciplinado e como defasagem de aprendizagem dos conteúdos das propostas curriculares pode também ser visto como práticas de resistência de alunos/as à homogeneidade exigida na escola. Esses movimentos de resistência possibilitam criar espaços de tensão, de fissuras, de desestabilização e transformação nas relações de poder instituídas. Desse modo, entendemos o contexto escolar além dos dispositivos de controle e normalização, ou seja, a escola constitui-se como um espaço privilegiado de práticas de liberdade.

**Palavras-chave:** indisciplina; relações de poder; práticas de liberdade.

## Prácticas de resistencia de alumnos en una escuela pública: otra posibilidad de ver la indisciplina y la 'brecha' de aprendizaje

**RESUMEN.** Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar prácticas de resistencia que los alumnos/as desarrollan contra los efectos de las relaciones de poder hegemónicas vigentes en una escuela pública. El análisis toma como referencia el campo teórico pos-estructuralista y entiende como Foucault que, dónde hay relaciones de poder, hay prácticas de resistencia y que éstas nunca se encuentran en relación de exterioridad al poder; al contrario, las prácticas de resistencia ocurren allí mismo donde hay relaciones de poder. En esta perspectiva, tanto las relaciones de poder como las prácticas de resistencia son productivas y tienen un potencial de creación y transformación. A través del análisis de entrevistas con profesores/as y de la observación de los/as alumnos/as, mostramos que aquello que la escuela entiende como

comportamiento indisciplinado y como ‘brecha’ de aprendizaje de los contenidos de las propuestas curriculares puede también ser visto como prácticas de resistencia de alumnos/as a la homogeneidad exigida en la escuela. Estos movimientos de resistencia posibilitan crear espacios de tensión, de fisuras, de desestabilización y transformación en las relaciones de poder instituidas. De esta manera, entendemos el contexto escolar más allá de los dispositivos de control y normalización, o sea, la escuela se constituye como un espacio privilegiado de prácticas de libertad.

**Palabras-clave:** indiciplina; relaciones de poder; prácticas de libertad.

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## Introduction

The present article aims to analyze practices of resistance students develop against the effects of power relations present in a public school. The analysis has taken the post-structuralist theoretical field as a reference, by understanding, in accordance with Foucault, that whenever there are power relations, there are also resistance practices, which are never exterior to power; on the contrary, the resistance practices occur in the very place where there are power relations. From this perspective, both power relations and resistance practices are productive and have potency for creation and transformation.

Through the analysis of interviews with teachers and observation of students, we show that what the school regards as ‘undisciplined’ behavior and a ‘learning gap’ the contents of the curricular proposals may also be seen as students’ practices of resistance to the homogeneity required by the school. To think these students’ activities as practices of resistance, force relations forming around power relations – a power that subdue bodies and conducts – enable the creation of spots of tension, fissures, destabilization, and transformation in the instituted power relations. Hence, we regard the school context beyond the control and normalization devices, that is, the school becomes a space of daily struggles, a place for a frequent game of forces – forces of subjection but also forces of resistance and freedom practices.

We first present the Foucaultian concepts of power and resistance to show that this game of forces is present in school institutions and in the constitution of its subjects. Secondly, we problematize what is understood by the school as ‘unruly behavior’ and ‘gap in learning’ to show these students’ movements/behaviors can be taken as practices of resistance against the instituted power relations’ effects. These resistance practices empower other ways of thinking about educational processes.

The school where our study took place is a state public institution located in the Central-West area of Brazil. It is an elementary school, with classes ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> grade up to 9<sup>th</sup> grade. We have conducted semi-structured interviews with nine teachers during the years of 2014 and 2015. All interviews took place in the teachers’ room. They were recorded with teachers’ consent and then transcribed for later analysis. To ensure the anonymity of the research subjects, we use fictitious names whenever we refer to them.

The teachers interviewed are from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade of elementary education. They come from all areas of knowledge – Sciences, English, Portuguese, Math, Arts, History, Physical Education, Religious Education, and Geography. Six out of the interviewees are female teachers, and three are male teachers; seven are permanent teachers, and two of them are not permanent teachers. All of them have a higher education degree, and their age ranges from 26 to 45 years. As for teaching time, five teachers have more than ten years of experience, three of them have five to 10 years of experience, and one of them has one year of teaching experience.

We have also observed students from 6<sup>th</sup> grade to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade before and after class time – when they arrived at the school, during the break time, exit time, in the court of sports, when they talked with their teachers in the corridors. Our observation of students in these spaces were facilitated by the fact that the school attends only students from the 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> grades in the evening period. Such observations were registered in our field book for later analysis.

According to our theoretical field, both teachers’ interviews and the observations of students we have conducted to collect data are tools seen as marked by subjectivity, warding off the chance of any objectivity and neutrality in the resulting knowledge. We are aware of the impossibility of apprehending the reality the way modernity first thought; we try to be able to contextualize, analyze, problematize, change singular and contextual truths. “Challenging a discourse, disqualifying statements, can help overturn the device

supporting them.” (Veyne, 2009, p. 104). In this sense, the knowledge produced in the process of this study has always been an interested one, both epistemologically and politically, since “[...] what matters as truth is questioned, it will be determined by a game of forces.” (Meyer, 2012, p. 54). Our research is part of this process of dispute for the production of truths.

### On power and resistance in Foucault: situating our analysis

When we propose to reflect upon the practices of resistance of students against the effects of power relations acting in the school context, we turn to the concepts of power and resistance as defined by Foucault (1996; 2000a; 2003). This author is one of the theorists linked to what is known as the post-structuralism movement, a field marked by “[...] a way of thinking, a way of philosophizing, and a form of writing, although the term must not be used to suggest any idea of homogeneity, singularity, or unity.” (Peters, 2000, p. 28). This theoretical perspective is a criticism of Humanism, the rational and autonomous subject, the universal pretensions of reason, the scientism of human sciences. That is why it also assumes an antifundamentalist and perspectivist epistemology. The post-structuralism movement departs from modern assumptions – universality, unity, and identity – and takes up differences as an important category in its thought.

One of the criticisms Foucault (2000b) presents to Western epistemology modern assumptions refers to the rational and autonomous subject. When the author states the death of the modern subject in his work *The Order of Things*, he causes discomfort in the society of the time for two reasons at least. According to Bruni (2006), the first reason is related to the fact that Foucault says the modern subject is not “[...] a full reality, the concrete being who lives, fights, works, speaks, and who has conquered nature, subjugated its forces and has set an empire on it.” (Bruni, 2006, p. 34). For Foucault (2000b), this subject is only an effect of knowledge, of the ‘episteme’ that has emerged at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and it considers man as the subject of language, ground, and essence of all things. When Foucault (2000b) declares the subject’s death, he intends to set free the knowledge and thinking of an identity epistemological model that historically has been subjugating alterity.

That is why Foucault (2000a) questions science and the cognitive subject, which are the products of a modern ‘episteme’.

The kind of question to be posed is: What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in very instant of your demand: “Is it science?” Which speaking, discoursing subjects – which subjects of experience and knowledge – do you then want to “diminish” when you say: “I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist”? Which theoretical-political *avant garde* do you want to enthrone in order to isolate it from all the discontinuous forms of knowledge that circulate about it? (Foucault, 2000a, p. 172).

With these questionings, the philosopher analyzes the mechanisms of power surrounding the notion of science and its pretension of universality and of a rational, unique, identical subject that is also the ground of knowledge. Here enters the second reason for a discomfort elicited by Foucault when he poses the notion that the modern subject is an active being, author of oneself, destined for revolution, freedom, the conquest of nature – i.e., for having questioned the ideals of modernity. According to Bruni (2006), modern knowledge builds up the idea that the subject always fulfills itself inside a project, that is where “[...] the obstacles to subject’s fulfillment must be analyzed, like many other figures of its finitude: alienation, death, unconsciousness.” (Bruni, 2006, p. 34). Instead of accepting the notion of subject, involving himself in the development of its potentialities and seeking to set it free via knowledge of science or the development of the consciousness – that is, instead of starting with the given subject –, Foucault proposes to analyze the subjection processes, the set of knowledge/power relations that precede the constitution of the subjects. The present analysis elicits not the modern subject – rational and autonomous – but a multiplicity of subjects – an effect of power, knowledge, and institutions.

When in the modern time sciences and philosophy build and take up as truth an ideal subject – subject of reason –, they become competent in building mechanisms of power to train the difference, forcing it to resemble identity, or silencing it, denying it, excluding it. In this case, power is a game of forces that assimilates or excludes, or as Foucault (2000a, p. 176) says: “[...] power would be the bellicose confrontation of forces [...]”, called by the author as Nietzsche’s hypothesis.

In this context, a string of institutions – industries, hospitals, prisons, schools – and disciplinary practices

come into play aiming to control a multiplicity of subjects and produce conducts and behaviors to a certain kind. We are referring to the disciplinary power which developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe and was applied firstly in specific institutions – such as convents and armies –, then spreading out in the society as a whole for the purpose of disciplining its subjects.

One of the characteristics of the disciplinary power is to be able to distribute the persons in enclosed and hierarchical places to make each one of them occupy a specific place and perform a useful task. It is also a characteristic of the disciplinary practices controlling a person's activities, schedules, movements/behaviors, and even manipulated objects. In controlling spaces and times, disciplinary practices aim an adjustment of the persons to obtain, through compositions of individual forces, an efficient functioning, i.e., they aim to extract the maximum possible effects out of the individuals.

Hierarchical surveillance, normalizing sanction, and the examination technique are amongst the mechanisms through which the disciplinary power acts in the several institutions and persons. Hierarchical surveillance enables the disciplinary power a broad look at all those within its domains. Lower hierarchies are observed by their immediate superiors and so on, culminating in the maximum hierarchy whose interest is to know and control everything and everybody. The panopticon, an architectural design described by Jeremy Bentham in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, is a good example of this surveillance mechanism; it makes “[...] the surveillance [to be] permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action.” (Foucault, 1996, p. 178). The person, the aim of the control and normalization, must feel watched constantly.

Normalizing sanction, another disciplinary power mechanism, implies a specific way of punishing behaviors and attitudes. Every behavior and attitude that is not controlled and punished by the major punishing systems is up to the normalizing sanction to watch, so that it is able to know and control people's actions, conduct, and behavior in a subtle and detailed way. Attitudes and behaviors we refer to encompass all gestures, conducts, and values that are not in accordance with the watching instance.

Examination is also a disciplinary power's tool; through it every person becomes a case. Constant inspections conducted into the disciplinary institutions – tests, interrogations – turn the body into an object to be described in medical records, notes, and reports. Persons are identified and differentiated out of notes that appear in records on their singularities, abilities, skills, and individual development.

In other words, disciplinary power is characterized by a series of coercion techniques that are extremely efficient at systematically scrutinizing persons' movement controlling their time and space. Its aim is to achieve, in particular, people's attitudes, gestures, and bodies. Based on Foucault, Revel (2005) says the techniques used by disciplinary power are individualization techniques – “[...] as watching someone, as controlling his or her conduct, behavior, attitudes, as intensifying his or her performance, multiplying their abilities, as placing them where they will be more useful.” (Revel, 2005, p. 35).

That is why for Foucault (2000a) power is not only repressive but also productive – it acts through a number of devices that form a “[...] decidedly heterogeneous set that encompasses discourses, institutions, architectural organizations, regulating decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, and philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 244). In short, this device encompasses the said and the unsaid, and works as a net establishing relationships between such elements. The devices' action at producing subjects is continuous and very subtle, sometimes they are almost imperceptible (however present) in the several institutions, even the educational ones – both in the documents and laws regulating these institutions and in pedagogical practices.

However, we know that whenever there are power relations there is, on the other hand, resistance. According to Foucault (1988), power relations can only exist in relation to a multiplicity of resistance points, “[...] resistances, plural, which are unique cases: possible, necessary, improbable, spontaneous, wild, solitary, planned, dragged, violent, irreconcilable, ready to compromise, interested or doomed to sacrifice.” (Foucault, 1988, p. 91) According to Foucault (1988, p. 92), resistances “[...] are the odd term in power relations; they inscribe to these relations as the irreducible interlocutor.”

So, even though Foucault (2015) has said the power has always been ‘there’, that we are never ‘outside’ of it, that there are no ‘margins’ for those who break the systems, it does not mean we must accept an absolute form of domain. For him, saying we are never outside of power does not mean we are completely captured by its traps. In the interview titled ‘Power and Strategies’, with Jacques Rancière (see Foucault, 2015), the French philosopher refers to the power relations and practices of resistance in the following

terms:

There are no relations of power without resistance; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies. (Foucault, 2015, p. 244).

From this perspective, practices of resistance do not mean a liberation in relation to power from a position of exteriority of the latter; on the contrary, practices of resistance occur right at the point where there are power relations – power relations and resistance practices are like the two sides of the same coin. We think that not only resistances can set new power relations, but also new power relations can originate new forms of resistance. It in this sense we analyze in the following pages ‘indiscipline’ as a practice of resistance of students to power relations instituted in a public school from Central-West area of Brazil.

### **On ‘indisciplines’ – or on practices of resistance of students to the school’s desired homogeneity**

In general, the school does not question those attitudes and behaviors considered as disciplined, because somehow the unruly behavior, according to Ratto (2007) involves passivity. The action takes place around “[...] those behaviors and attitudes goes beyond what is expected in such a place and are ranked generally as undisciplined” (Dinali & Ferrari, 2011, p. 243). It is about indiscipline that we are going to consider in the following pages, regarding ‘unruly behavior’ as a practice of resistance. In the Foucaultian perspective, indiscipline as a resistance practice means positivity, creative action, novelty, event – the event is what does not cease to happen, it is the expression of the forces of becoming.

We consider the relationship between discipline and indiscipline in the school where our study was carried out as a game of forces. This is because where there are power relations, on the one hand, there are movements of resistance, on the other (Foucault, 1988). So, no matter how we strive to create a ‘disciplined’ environment, in accordance with the ‘norm’, there will always be conflicting and resistance reactions. This expression of resistance brings forth significant potentialities, for they “[...] may place us before the experience of alterity, in the sense of the radically other, i.e., of those that do not manifest our expectations, do not confirm our intentions nor reaffirm our identity” (Ratto, 2007, p. 178). It may also lead us to reflect upon the meaning of pedagogical practices that deny conflict, difference, the behavior that goes beyond the norm, bearing mind states of fullness and harmony.

What Ms. Verônica and Mr. Pedro, who teach at the school, say about indiscipline translates well this game of forces between power relations and practices of resistance. Verônica talks about the hardships involved in keeping students disciplined: “Indiscipline makes it very hard; sometimes we spend 10-15 minutes to get their attention, to cease playing, to concentrate for us to be able to work – so, indiscipline is what has bothered me the most” (Ms. Verônica). Mr. Pedro says: “Today we have a lot of problems involving indiscipline [...] students need to have limits [...] it is a difficult task for all of us, it is not easy, but we try” (Mr. Pedro).

Verônica’s and Pedro’s thought in relation to students’ indiscipline makes reflect, on the one hand, about how the power relations, which extend from their training to how they conceive education, influences them in such a way that makes it difficult to see from another perspective the students’ actions and reactions. Seeing students’ ‘undisciplined’ actions as practices of resistance implies breaking out with the discipline/indiscipline duality, in which the former is the norm, and the latter needs to conform. In other words, it implies understanding that the subjects in the school context are always, in one way or another, resisting to subjection processes underway. At the same extent school exerts power, Gallo (2005) says it undergoes exercises of power.; “[...] to the same extent it generates powers that are its affirmation, it also generates powers that are potential for negation” (Gallo, 2005, p.218).

On the other hand, what Verônica and Pedro say in relation to students’ indiscipline also makes us see some practices of resistance at the school; it shows us some strategies students put in action to react to the forms of subjection exercises. One type of students’ behavior considered a disciplinary problem by the school – for us, it is a practice of resistance – refers to delays, anticipated exits, and absences in class. We

say it based on the observations we conducted, from which we point out the case of a student who had arrived late; to go into the classroom, he needed to pass in front of the school secretary, where one of the workers controls the entries and exits of the students. Considering he would be questioned by the person in charge and that he would need to explain the reason for his delay, say said: 'It was the bus that was late, not me.' When released, he jumps around and smiles, as if relieved at having been able to justify himself. We say it based also on what Mr. Paulo, another teacher at the school, says about one of the students: "He never comes to class, he arrives too late, leaves early, his parents are convincing" (Mr. Paulo).

We may think that such frequent delays and their explanations, as well as the absences and the need to leave school early, are, amongst other possibilities, forms of resistance of these students to the rigorous control of time, schedules, homogenized and synchronized use of time to which they are submitted. At school time, "[...] one has to be punctual, one has to learn the idea that there is a right time for everything, one has to conform to standardized uses of time, valid for everyone and, at the same time, for all" (Ratto, 2007, p. 153). Internalizing school time and use as homogeneously as possible seems to be one of the conditions for learning. That is why delays, leaving early, bathroom visits – everything that threatens school time norms – are condemned.

In an attempt to control the school regulated time, Mr. Paulo sets some rules in the classroom:

To control their visits to the bathroom, I give them tickets. I give them three tickets for every term. If they want to leave the classroom, for whatever reason, they have to use one ticket. They have three tickets, but if they do not use them during the term I grant them half a point at the end (Mr. Paulo).

It is important to note here that a 'visit to the bathroom' becomes a focus of tension in the school. What is lived outside school "[...] as a basic action of 'going to pee' – when people simply get up and walk towards a WC to satisfy their need – inside of it can become a potential moment of confusion" (Ratto, 2007, p. 156).

It happens due to the need the school has of making its time a useful, productive, homogenized one. This is related, to a certain extent, to assessment devices. Before large scale assessments, the school is involved in, teachers feel pressured by the long lists of 'obligatory' contents to be taught and learned by students in order to get good rates, enforcing a strict curriculum idea towards its subjects and contents. In addition to that, the idea that the teaching quality can be measured by these factors forces an "[...] association of school time to a 'useful time', a 'time of reproduction', a time to be controlled, scrutinized and homogenized, as much as possible, so that its curricular program can be finished" (Ratto, 2007, p. 163) and those rates can be achieved.

The homogenized, uniform and synchronized use of time, bearing in mind greater productivity – in this case, greater learning –, has already been highlighted by Foucault (1996) as one of the disciplinary power devices. According to him, what is defined as time-table in the middle of the 18th century "[...] is more than a collective and obligatory rhythm, imposed from the outside; it is a program; it assures the elaboration of the act itself; it controls its development and stages from inside" (Foucault, 1996, p. 137), aiming to maximize time and transform it into work-time. Foucault (1996) singles out that the measured, regulated, synchronized time must be a pure time, without impurities or defects; it must be a time of good quality "[...] through which the body is constantly applied to its exercise. Precision and application are, with regularity, the fundamental virtues of disciplinary time" (Foucault, 1996, p. 137).

It is in relation to this 'striated space' of school, characterized by Deleuze e Guattari (1997) as a *cogitatio universalis* space, which "[...] draws a path that must be followed from one point to another [...]" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997, p. 39), that many students develop practices of resistance. That is why, as said above, Mr. Paulo is dissatisfied with the student who arrives later in school and leaves early – even though having set rules for the classroom –, saying this is because he is more 'delicate' and parents are conniving. These students' actions – which the school often takes as indiscipline – might suggest lines of flight (Deleuze & Parnet, 1998), the exercise of power, creation becomings, and desterritorializations these students develop against subjectivation processes in force in the school. Regarding these subjectivation processes, we can say that "[...] not only are prisoners treated like children, but children are treated like prisoners" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 73), and that this is what they resist. After all, for the French philosopher "[...] schools resemble prisons a little bit [...]" (Foucault, 2000a, p. 73), notion suggested by Mr. João when he says: "This school is valued because it is an enclosed school, in the center of the city, where the student is not able to jump the wall or leave" (Mr. João).

It explains the need in the school where our study was conducted of an employee in charge of controlling students' entry and exit so that they stay all the time inside classrooms. With such a watch, the school aims to control some practices of resistance students develop in the school context. Frequent delays, leaving school early, the explanations put forth absences can indicate students' resistances to what Deleuze and Guattari (1997) call school's 'striated space', where movements must always attend a set of rules. Moreover, at the same time students' actions and reactions to controlling and normalization devices are forms of resistance to striated space, they trigger other configuration of forces, turning the striated space into a smooth space, which "[...] is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentered, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without 'counting' it and can 'be explored only by legwork.'" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1997, p. 31).

There is a positivity or a productivity in the disciplines, for, if there is such a game of forces, "[...] it is because there exist power relations and, so, there are possibilities of singularizing different spaces, different forces amongst students, teachers, technicians, coordinators, parents, are in force" (Dinali & Ferrari, 2011, p. 237). Therefore, such resistances make it possible to create spaces of tension, fissures, destabilization, and change in the instituted power relations; resistances result in effects, they break with the continuous space and linear time, and they create other spaces inside the controlled and normalized school time.

Not only the delays, the reasons given, absences and exits early can be seen as unruly behavior in the school studied, but also how people dress, behave, deal with sexuality, i.e., the usage of the body and sexuality. Louro (2000) says that, in the history of education, the preoccupation with the body always has been central in the planning of pedagogical practices. According to this author, "[...] every schooling process has always been – and still are – worried at watching, controlling, modeling, building the bodies of boys and girls, young men and women" (Louro, 2000, p. 60). Foucault (1996), in his work *Discipline and Punish*, formulated the several techniques invented to discipline the body. He said: "A disciplined body is the prerequisite of an efficient gesture, 1996, p. 139).

However, the numerous techniques invented to "[...] scrutinize the bodies, know them and school them; to produce gestures, postures, and polite, Christian, civilized, urbanized, docile movements to build healthy, hygienic, adequate and dignified habits" (Louro, 2000, p.60) do not guarantee full control over the bodies in the context of the school studied. We highlight what Mr. Paulo have said about a student who, according to Paulo, is more 'delicate': "He misses our class a lot, he leaves early, he arrives later, everybody likes making fun of him, teasing him, his parents once needed to come to school to deal with it" (Mr. Paulo). We also highlight what Ms. Verônica have said when, according to her, she asked one of the students to talk to and to change your behavior: "I told him, 'you have to change your behavior... because you keep rolling'" (Ms. Verônica). And we highlight as well what Mr. Paulo has said that, even though the school has a pedagogical coordination with a very iron fist, it is not possible to control the body and sexuality of students – for 'inadequate' behaviors come up all the time –, and this is a clue to how difference shows its singularity in this school's space. Based on our theoretical perspective, 'inadequate behaviors,' – that is, 'being delicate,' 'vulgar,' 'keep rolling,' – can be assumed as practices of resistance to normalizing processes of the body and sexuality.

In Foucault (1988) we are reminded that in the last three centuries there was a 'discursive explosion' about sex. Differently to those who thought the 17<sup>th</sup> century would represent the beginning of a repressive time against sexuality, Foucault (1988) points to a 'discursive' incitation' over it. According to him, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on "[...] discourses about sex did not cease to proliferate" (Foucault, 1988, p. 22). Since then, sexuality has been "[...] described, understood, explained, regulated, sanitized, educated, normatized from several perspectives and disciplinary fields, constituting itself in the midst of equally varied purposes and interests" (Louro, 2000, p. 64). Sexuality has become a field of contention in which compete several institutions, as the state, the church, science – to mention the most 'traditional' ones – and, more recently, social movements, as the feminist and sexual 'minorities' movements, with discourses that, according to Louro (2000) are other discourses, with other notions and ethics.

However, even though there is a multiplicity of discourses on sexuality, we think with Louro (2000) there still is a hegemony of discourses that bears the force of 'tradition' and, because of that, they hardly are put into question. An appeal to a biologist matrix is the hallmark of these discourses. Although other approaches about sexuality were already been proposed and have been showing the chance to think some

issues regarding sexuality as part of cultural and social processes, we see the existence of a religious notion articulated with a biologist, binary, sexist, moralist, heteronormative notion of sexuality, a notion that still is present in the school context and in society at large. We see it when Mr. Paulo says the ‘delicate’ student is subject for jokes in the school, or when Ms. Verônica reaches out to a religious Christian discourse to talk about men and women, saying “God has created man to be man, and woman to be a woman” (Ms. Verônica).

The practices of resistance these students develop in their school context in opposition to body’s and sexuality’s control and normalization – in this case, circumventing school time, dress and behave differently to the established norms – have built up other configurations of forces, other power relations. At the same time Mr. Paulo says he is not used to this ‘kind’ of behavior, he concedes that he needs to ‘adapt’, i.e., he agrees he needs to think other forms of dealing with his students.

From our viewpoint, not only the students’ ‘indiscipline’ might be seen as practices of resistance in the school context in which our study was held, but also the non-learning of the subjects inscribed in the school’s curriculum. Instead of thinking that there is “[...] a gap in learning ... [that the students] don’t have future in life” (Mr. José), we tend to think these students’ actions are a form of resistance to learning universalized and validated school subjects as being the most important ones. This is what we are going to consider in the following lines.

## **Learning escape the control: students’ practices of resistance to curricula content standardization**

According to Gallo (2014), modern education aims ‘to teach all to everyone’ – an idea coined by the educator and pedagogue from the 17<sup>th</sup> century John Amos Comenius. In the context of that century and even today, it is believed that, if there are methods to achieve at a safe knowledge, then there must also be methods to teach rapidly and safer. Gallo (2014) says thinking about methods is extremely important, for it is the method that supports sameness and uniformity, it is the method that reduces our differences, it is the method that makes everyone needs to learn the same things at the same time. It is the method that allows us to know what to do, how to do, when to do, and therefore it is the method that allows us to control the processes of subjectivation, to control and normalize any and all deviation.

Yet, if one of the goals of the modern school and, in a sense, in contemporary times is to ‘teach all to everyone’, then at the same time, bearing in mind a homogenization of the processes of subjectivation through a universalized teaching, such goal rarely occurs as planned. Even in the face of external evaluations that rank education today, and demand pedagogical practices with the intention of making all the students have the same levels of knowledge and about the same things, many students do not learn what they were supposed to, but they learn other things.

So, what about those students that do not learn what they are supposed to, such as Mr. Paulo’s students? Mr. Paulo says: “I try to systematize, making it as easy as possible, every each it becomes more complicated to make these children absorb knowledge” (Mr. Paulo). He goes on:

It frustrates me a lot because sometimes, no matter how much you work, plan your classes, bring up topics, correct stuff, give tests, do our best, and even so it seems we are just doing what has to be done because nothing works, it is so frustrating (Mr. Paulo)

Gallo (2012) reminds us that some studies in psychology of education have been building a certain meaning to the educational processes related to the idea of teaching and learning as inseparable notions as if the act of teaching naturally resulted in learning. According to these theories, it is only possible to learn what is taught, and one cannot learn without someone teaching, so that it is possible to control what, how and when one learns. These postulates coming from the psychology of education field still influences educational processes today. The educational processes is understood from a scientific perspective<sup>1</sup> and gives the teacher the confidence on how to teach and evaluate students’ learning.

<sup>1</sup> Gallo (2005) says that throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was an effort in the sense of recognizing the studies in pedagogy as scientific. “Why a science of pedagogy? Because only it would grant us a certainty about the truth, a single method, an absolute control. This scientification of pedagogy is an example of what Nietzsche called ‘will of truth’, which enlivened modern thought” (Gallo, 2005, p. 219).



This way of doing things aims to control what people learn and homogenization of subjectivities, since its goal is that everybody learns the same things and the same way. The question remains: why students do not learn what they are supposed to?

In the work *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze (1988) lead us to consider this issue when says that “We never know in advance how someone will learn: by means of what loves someone becomes good at Latin, what encounters make them a philosopher, or in what dictionaries they learn to think” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 159); it shows us the learning’s unpredictability. Just how there is no more a method for learning, Deleuze (1998, p. 159) also says “[...] there is [not] a method for finding treasures [...]”, for learning “[...] follows the path of encounters and loves, not the methods of an always impotent pedagogy, out of the passions” (Schèrer, 2005, p. 1191).

In this perspective, the act of learning is not mere recognition<sup>2</sup> anymore – as it is in the Platonic philosophy – but an event, the creation of something new and unique in mind. As an event, the act of learning is shrouded in unpredictability, and this learning’s unpredictability “[...] throws away all pretension of modern pedagogy into being a science, the possibility of planning, controlling, measuring learning processes” (Gallo, 2012, p. 4). Hence teachers’ hardships in making their students learn the topics taught the way they wish – no matter how they plan activities, tests, they never get to control what their students learn nor how it will happen.

Still, in this respect, Deleuze (1972) says the act of learning escapes of any control because this event happens out of an ‘encounter with signs.’ In *Proust y los Signos*, Deleuze’s (1972) emphasis is not on the act of learning as emission of signs, but on the act of learning as an encounter with the signs.

Learning is essentially concerned with *signs*. Signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not ‘the Egyptologist’ of something. One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs (Deleuze, 1972, p. 12).<sup>3</sup>

To learn, in the Deleuzian perspective, means to be in relation with signs, understand them as problems to be considered whose answer is never the same; on the contrary, it is always singular, innovative, unexpected. Every apprentice sets a specific relation with signs, reacts to them singularly, and produces in such a relation always something different. It means that each one learns in a certain way, and that is why to learn has to do with singularities. Gallo (2012, p. 8) says, “[...] in a same class, with a same teacher, multiple learning take place, since there are multiple students and each one learns in their own way”. It means that learning is not harmonically and orderly ‘mimicking,’ but grasp signs of things we are interested in and that mobilize us to action.

From this, we can say the education derived from documents and policies say what to teach, how to teach, why to teach, and to whom to teach, via curricular guidelines and references. On this subject, Mr. Paulo says, “[...] they say it is referential, but it is compulsory, you have to do what’s written there” (Mr. Paulo). According to Gallo (2008), the goals is to become a huge controlling machine, a students’ subjectivation machine, deciding which contents must be taught and learned in the school. On the other hand, the stronger the power relations in this context aim a certain homogenization, the more resistances will take place. Foucault (1988) says power relations generate resistances, and these attempts for control can, always, escape any control.

That is why, according to Deleuze (1988), that if learning is something that escapes control, for it has to do with unpredictability and event; if learning is placed beyond what we do in our classrooms; if learning imposes its heterogeneity and the establishment of differences; then, in the act of learning, a resistance is always possible. It is possible to resist – not to learn or learn in a different way standardized, universalized, formatted topics to meet hegemonic interests. We can say that Mr. Paulo’s, Mr. João’s and Ms. Laura’s students resist the learning of contents that, to a certain extent, prevent the manifestation of knowledge

<sup>2</sup> In our Western tradition, according to Gallo (2012), education has been considered based on the Platonic philosophy, which says that learning is a recognition. “Learning is, therefore, a recognition, to know again something we already knew. Such a process can be ‘accelerated’ and improved with exercises – the educational processes – and it culminates in philosophy, the knowledge of pure Ideas” (Gallo, 2012, p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> Aprender concierne esencialmente a los signos. Los signos son el objeto de un aprendizaje temporal y no de un saber abstracto. Aprender es, en primer lugar, considerar una materia, un objeto, un ser, como si emitieran signos por descifrar, por interpretar. No hay aprendiz que no sea ‘egiptólogo’ de algo. No se llega a carpintero más que haciéndose sensible a los signos del bosque, no se llega a médico más que haciéndose sensible a los signos de la enfermedad. La vocación es siempre predestinación con relación a signos. Todo aquello que nos enseña algo emite signos, todo acto de aprender es una interpretación de signos o de jeroglíficos.

that comprises other interests, voices, cultures. We say it because, according to Mr. Paulo, Mr. João, and Ms. Laura, even though they work hard and get prepared to teach, they do not succeed in their initiatives.

In relation to content learning present in school's curriculums, we highlight based on the observation conducted, some mechanisms of resistance found by one student at the moment when his teacher and the school's pedagogical coordination were presenting him some rules to improve his performance in several subjects. When he was sent by his teacher to the pedagogical coordination's room – in the presence of his mother –, due to delay in submitting his works on time e for not having good results in the tests, he sits before the coordinator, stares the wall beside him and agrees with everything. At first, we could say he was agreeing with all the coordinator's demands, when his mother comments the following: "He always agrees like this, he does it at home too, but keep doing the same things, the way he does."

The mother's comment leads us to think that, even under the controlling and normalizing power devices in force at the school, movements of resistance take place in several forms. In the case of this student, it is possible to understand his 'bad performance' as a form of resistance to the learning of contents that do not regard, to a certain extent, the contexts in which schools are found and where students are constituted.

Instead of attributing the non-learning of contents present in the school's curriculum by the students to some 'learning disability' (Mr. José), 'lack of interest' (Ms. Laura), 'lack of discipline' (Ms. Verônica), 'lack of attention' (Mr. Pedro), 'destructured family' (Ms. Isabel), 'technological apparatus' (Mr. João) – ideas still adopted by these professors –, we can also take these movements as resistances to "[...] very especial narratives on what constitutes a legitimate knowledge, what makes valid and legitimate forms of reasoning, on what reason is and what it is not, on which groups are legitimately able to reason or not" (Silva, 2012, p. 190). Still, we can take these movements as forms of resistance to the curriculum inscribed knowledge and its way of transmission, as well as to power relations regulating, controlling, and governing the subjectivities.

To put it another way, these students' resistances can also be seen as a way of questioning the current regulation regimes inscribed in the curriculum and as "[...] a possibility of challenging and modifying those power relations that tends to exclude a certain kind of knowledge and social groups, those that tend to stigmatize and undermine them" (Silva, 2012, p. 196).

This leads us to think that difference is present, although the Western modern epistemology and its identity logics are constituted as a pedagogical device present in the school context that understands reality based on the concept of sameness, that leads everyone, regardless of their faith, social condition our cultural context, to learn the same things and to behave alike and adopt the same values. According to Mr. João, the students 'question,' 'debate,' 'turn his routine complicated', that is, they produce alternative spaces inside the school's normalized and striated own space.

In this regard, we transcribe one of Mr. Paulo's answer, in which he shows the need of creating negotiation spaces among teachers and students. In reference to external evaluations all students have to undergo, he says it is needed to negotiate it with students so they become studious and are able to perform well at school.

We work, encourages our students, [...] there's also an incentive [...] for tests and grades. Students tend not to participate in one activity that does not represent any grade for their final evaluation; if it does not count for that end, then they don't take it. So, we teachers end up encouraging them: "Look, when you get involved in these activities we'll turn them into grades" (Mr. Paulo).

Resistances take place in the micro-political level and they question the macro-politics, as it is the case of Mr. Paulo's students, who refuse to study those standardized topics aiming to perform well in large-scale tests unless they get in return 'extra points'. It creates other spaces where other pedagogical practices can be considered. The fact that these teachers have to negotiate 'grades' with their students points out to the political ramification of an education in the micro level, setting "[...] trenches from which a daily-life and direct relations between persons politics is fomented, trenches, in their turn, exert effects over social macro-relations" (Gallo, 2008, p. 68). In it we see small, daily things digging their own holes, contaminating spaces, eliciting resistances.

We want to say that the pretention of the education of the instituted policies, aiming to make all learn the same things the same way, manifests the students' subjectivities homogenization will. If according to Deleuze (1972), teaching means the emission of signs without controlling what students will do when they

find themselves with them, it would be better to give up this will of control over what students learn – although the pedagogical devices that lead us to this control – , and teach them as the one who “[...] sows seeds freely, hoping it may enable encounters, differences that may succeed in life, enchanting us with multiple creations that may come from them [...]” (Gallo, 2012, p. 9), leaving aside the will that all behave the same way and do the same things. In this way, ‘anyone,’ and ‘in any way,’ can learn in our schools.

After all, says Deleuze (1988), learning is not acquiring or seize a knowledge, as in the Platonic recognition perspective. On the contrary, he says “To learn is but the intermediary between not-knowing and knowing, the living passage from one to the other” (Deleuze, 1988, p. 160). In this case, learning is less in the philosopher’s side of the cavern, which emphasizes the act of learning, and not the process, e more in the rat’s side in the labyrinth, which, even if it does not find the exit, it learns from its wanderings. And if what matters is the process, says Gallo (2012, p. 5), then “[...] it is better to live the event than to live what actually we get from such a passage.”

What school considers as ‘a gap in learning’ can also be taken as a practice of resistance in not knowing properly the topics inscribed in the curriculum. This is because students encounter with other signs and produce, through these encounters, other learning – learning that becomes significant in the ‘wanderings’ through their districts’ labyrinths, beliefs, social condition, culture, context; it is learning often silenced, invisible, turned inferior in this school’s context.

## Final considerations

When we regard and problematize what school takes as unruly behavior and students ‘learning gap’, we see a chance of considering these movements, behaviors as practice of resistances against the effects of the power relations instituted in the school context, which, in a certain way, disregards specific contexts and singularities of each student. Foucault (1988) says that what enable spaces for resistances are the power relations themselves. So, it is not against the power these resistances are waged, but against their effects, and their creation and transformation potentiality is grounded on this fact.

That is why the practices of resistance in force in the school studied have such an extent; that is why they have this force of (dis)encounter with power relations that are instituted and to create “[...] fissures in the present [...]” and “[...] at the place of the fissure the line forms a Law, the center of the cyclone, where one can live and in fact where Life exists par excellence” (Deleuze, 2005, p. 130). When these resistances fracture the present, they change the power relations and the course of things; they introduce a vacuum, or an indetermination in the very course of things and actions. That is why, for Deleuze (2005), when the power relations take life as an object, life becomes resistance to power relations. Life’s most intense point is, for Deleuze (2005) and Foucault (2003), in the encounter between the power relations and the practices of resistance.

In this sense, we regard the school context as a space of tension between forces, like a game of forces between power relations and practices of resistance. According to our analysis carried out in the present article, this space is characterized by the richness, creativity, and possibilities of change it offers. So, even though the school involved in the study is entangled in the modernity’s identity epistemology, that presents itself as being hegemonic in the said institution and, at large, in the society, these students find spaces for practices of resistance.

However, these practices of resistance do not intend to build a ‘new’ and ‘better’ epistemology, nor a ‘new’ and ‘better’ system based on reason, truth or humanity, for any epistemology or system like this, which aims at being hegemonic, will bring about exclusion and subalternization effects. In the context of school studied, these practices of resistance enable to contaminate, disturb, undermine the limits imposed by the power relations that are instituted, and mitigate several forms of violence. They also elicit ruptures and discontinuities there where continuous developments were found, and destabilize the current truth regime so that thinking is inserted in those fractured lines and make a difference. That is why the affirmation of the difference in this school is formed, according to Foucault (2014), in a permanent agonistic model, for, he says, the practices of resistance can undermine the limits that are established by power relations in force, but new limits always will arise.

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