The conditions of teachinng work in context of disputes

As condições do trabalho docente no contexto de disputas

Las condiciones de trabajo docente en el contexto de disputas

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Abstract: The complex social settings pose a series of dilemmas to teachers, resulting in work precarization and hindering the execution of several tasks that are part of their job description. The goal of this study is analyzing the working conditions of public school teachers in the city of Maceió, AL, Brazil, during the pandemic. The methodology employed a qualitative approach, more specifically, an exploratory research. Data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire answered by Maceió public school teachers. Key results show that those teachers have faced a context of intensified work permeated by several educational issues caused by social disparities and by the lack of the technological infrastructure required for educational practices.
Keywords: Teachers' work. Precarization. Public school. Pandemic.

Resumo: Os dilemas da profissão docente, resultantes da complexa arena social, geram a precarização do trabalho e dificultam as múltiplas ações que são exigidas pela função. O objetivo da pesquisa foi analisar as condições do trabalho docente em tempos de pandemia na rede pública municipal de educação de Maceió, Alagoas, Brasil. A metodologia esteve pautada na abordagem qualitativa e, como técnica, a pesquisa exploratória. Como coleta de dados, utilizou-se o questionário, via Google Forms, com os professores da rede pública municipal de Maceió. Os principais resultados apontaram que os profissionais estiveram inseridos em um contexto de intensificação do trabalho e suas atividades foram permeadas por problemáticas educacionais, em decorrência da falta de estruturas tecnológicas para o desenvolvimento das práticas educativas, bem como resultado das desigualdades sociais.
Palavras-chave: Trabalho Docente. Precarização. Escola Pública. Pandemia.

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Resumen: Los dilemas de la profesión docente, derivados del complejo escenario social, generan un trabajo precario y dificultan las múltiples acciones que requiere la función. El objetivo de la investigación fue analizar las condiciones del trabajo docente en tiempos de pandemia en el sistema de educación pública municipal de Maceió, Alagoas, Brasil. La metodología se basó en el enfoque cualitativo y, como técnica, la investigación exploratoria. Como recogida de datos se utilizó el cuestionario, vía Google Forms, con profesores de la red pública municipal de Maceió. Los principales resultados señalaron que los profesionales se encontraban insertados en un contexto de intensificación del trabajo y sus actividades estaban permeadas por problemas educativos, debido a la falta de estructuras tecnológicas para el desarrollo de las prácticas educativas, así como como resultado de las desigualdades sociales.
Palabras clave: Trabajo Docente; Precariedad; Escuela pública; Pandemia.

1   INTRODUCTION

Teaching is complex work across all educational levels and modalities; a number of social and political aspects are involved in education professionals' actions, feelings, dreams, affects, emotions, empathy, plans, and working conditions. The dilemmas arising from a complex social arena promote hostility towards new challenges and hinder the execution of the multiple tasks in teachers' job description.

Teaching work "is connected to the notion of social class – regarded as representation and as a part of the process in which one's teaching identity is constituted; likewise, it also relates to the concept of social and cultural workers" (Streck; Redin; Zitkoski, 2015, p. 700), and it is subjected to market demands, political and social contradictions, and the oppression and production relationships the capitalist system introduced into work dynamics.

Teaching regular in-person classes is hard work that comprises multiple activities ranging from planning to guiding individual and collective initiatives during classroom management, aside from the tasks listed in Article no. 13 of Bill no. 9.394 – Guidelines and Foundations for National Education (GFNE), passed on December 2oth, 1996, such as: participation in the composition of the school's pedagogic proposal; creating and executing a work plan; promoting students' learning; coming up with recovery strategies for low-performance students; teaching contractual schooldays and hours, in addition to full participation in the hours designated for planning, evaluation, and professional development activities; collaborating on activities that connect one's school to families and to the community(GFNE/1996).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a disease caused by coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that has spread all over the world and caused all manner of social, political, cultural, and health conflicts, the need for social distancing has pushed schools to try and carry out their activities remotely. To this date, approximately 711.964 people have died of COVID-19 in Brazil, which has called for changes in how people work and study, among other things. In

consequence, teachers' job description has also changed to include more items, impacting work hours as well as the planning and execution of educational practices.

The goal of this study is analyzing the working conditions of public school teachers in the city of Maceió during the pandemic. We set out to understand the dilemmas imposed by the current circumstances to teachers trying to do their jobs as required.

The present study employed a qualitative approach – we conducted an exploratory research. Participants are Maceió public school teachers (early childhood, elementary, and middle school). The data collection instrument was a Google Forms questionnaire. A total of 120 (one hundred and twenty) teachers answered the questionnaire between February 23rd and March 9th, 2021. Data were analyzed according to Bardin's (2002) Content Analysis principles, utilizing the following categories: teachers' work, precarization, public school, pandemic.

This study is comprised of an introduction, three interconnected sections, and a conclusion. In the first section, we discuss education during the pandemic, focusing on the discrepancies between official regulations and reality. In the second section we comment on the precarization of teachers' work, based on the obstacles posed by educational policy. Lastly, we present the opinions voiced by our research participants about the precarization imposed by the pandemic to the professional reality faced by Maceió public school teachers.

2 PANDEMIC AND EDUCATION: OFFICIAL REGULATIONS V. REALITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has further aggravated issues already regarded as bottlenecks by educational policy (Saviani; Galvão, 2021). Those issues relate directly to the dilemmas posed by our social structure, such as the existing political, social, and economic disparities that impact the organization of schools during the pandemic and jeopardize the right to education due to the lack of basic technological infrastructure required under the current circumstances.

Social distancing calls for new ways of developing educational practices, which require investments in technology so that educational goals can be achieved (Colemarx, 2020). Schools' communication processes and activities are being reconfigured to happen via technologically-mediated interaction. However, the lack of resources now required for pedagogical processes puts public school students in a difficult position.

According to Sena (2020), the public school context is rendered invisible by the official guidelines from the public agencies in charge of defining education parameters, such as the

National, State and City Education Councils. This produces social exclusion and compounds social and educational disparities. As Gonçalves *et al.* (2020, p. 25) explain:

> [...] another wide-ranging consequence is the announced death of free, good Public Education that follows 1) the deterioration of tenets such as quality, equal access opportunities, and permanence, which fail to be available to all students when educational activities happen remotely, thus eroding Article no. 3 of the Guidelines and Foundations for National Education Bill, and 2) the process of depreciating the Teaching profession, kicked off by this attempt to render secondary the key role of teachers in ensuring emancipatory education.

Sena and Gonçalves provide key contributions to the debate on guaranteeing the constitutional principles according to which all students have a right to free education, to access to education, and to succeed in school. When public education fails to ensure that its participants have the tools to participate in formative activities during the pandemic, it generates exclusion and renders the unassisted invisible in the complex social context.

Defending a public education that can meet current social distancing requirements involves striving for educational policy that ensures Education Council guidelines are actually feasible under the conditions faced by students and education professionals. Consistent with this perspective, the best way to implement remote teaching would be to discuss the actual possibilities available to each social agent, establishing a dialogue with public agencies to ensure that those paradigms can be satisfactorily integrated into public school reality.

Discrepancies between official guidelines and reality happen across several social dimensions of Brazilian reality and are often connected to social disparities. In education, the existing structural disparities cause political and social incongruities that keep students from fully experiencing what public schools can offer, as many of them struggle with unfulfilled basic needs.

A significant portion of public school students do not have access to basic social rights, which raises tensions between official guidelines and reality (Colemarx, 2020). Legally, education is a social right, and so are health, food, work, shelter, transport, leisure, safety, social security, the protection of mothers and children, and assistance to destitute persons (as per Article no. 6 of the Federal Constitution of 1988). However, during the pandemic it became evident that, to most Brazilians, social rights are a constitutional conundrum.

According to Demo (1994), social policy is necessary and crucial to guarantee citizens' constitutional rights and mitigate social disparities. An analysis of the present situation of public education reveals that current public policy is failing to provide opportunities to effectuate emancipatory, political, and educational autonomy. The manner

in which the policies and programs designed to fight the complex educational situation are being executed shows how the State views society and unveils its attitude towards those rendered invisible. As Sena (2020, p. 200) writes:

> The discussion has also raised questions about the purpose of schools and the role of teachers during the pandemic and its palpable effects on everyday life. There are also questions about how to keep distance education from compounding the existing social and educational disparities, from weakening students' education, and from aggravating the precarization of teachers' work. Based on that, it is reasonable to say that the sudden imposition of technologies as the only way to preserve the interactive ties between schools and students has rekindled the debate on the school's role in the formation of social subjects. The teacher's role in the teaching process and aspects of his/her professional education are once more being discussed.

In these exceptional times, the work of public school education professionals has become a formidable challenge as their tasks, work hours, and activities related to educational practices have increased. Contradictorily, these professionals are subjected to increasingly high demands while there are glaring gaps on the infrastructure required to carry out the planned activities; to name but a few, "the many rules of remote 'teaching', technological exclusion, the non-democratic decision processes that led to the choice of this educational model, the precarization and intensification of the work of teachers and other school staff" (Saviani; Galvão, 2021, p. 38).

In our present context, technologies have become an urgent requirement, seen as how they are the means to complete educational tasks, which impacts the actions and the formation of all involved and imposes limitations to the work of education professionals. Generally speaking, "what drives thousands of men and women, especially the young, to agree to technologically-mediated jobs with hyper-flexible working arrangements that are often disguised as 'autonomous' occupations is the sheer need to survive" (Praun, 2020, p. 5).

The capitalist mode of production is intense, and it does not stop, not even during dark times. Lives, times, experiences, inspirations, and mental health are of no concern to the system, which sees nothing but the active workforce and its economical contributions to the country. Thus, what we have is "on one hand, bodies subjected to flexibilized, intensified, underpaid work totally devoid of rights. On the other hand, the 'rest', a contingent that can no longer reenter the job market. Disposable" (Praun, 2020, p. 5), evidencing neoliberal principles during a social tragedy.

Education professionals are not exempt from this issue as they are called to operationalize strategies conceived by a small group that often does not understand the basic principles underlying emancipatory and democratic public education – especially if

they happen to be businessmen and the makers of privatization-based educational policy. During the pandemic, we have witnessed the aggravation of social exclusion and a rise on attacks on the population forgotten by governmental institutions, evidencing the intense power[4] struggles within social and political structures.

To Santos Neto and Araújo (2021, p. 32-33):

> The attacks on public university and on K-12 education definitely signal that capital has nothing to offer to the working class, nor to humanity in general. During a time when we should have been building hospitals to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on the health of working-class citizens, capital representatives are exclusively concerned with banker profits. Education resources are cut down – they terminate scholarships that funded research on coronavirus (COVID-19) to serve the interests of bankers, businessman, and landowners. [...] Capital is barbaric, and it uses coronavirus to attack the working class' right to education. For that reason, workers must be alert and bolster their organization mechanisms to fight the capitalist system.

Teachers have been gradually suffering neoliberal offensives into their professional lives, especially regarding the precarization of their work at schools and the many attributions they are currently demanded to fulfill by the government and society alike. Working conditions, the high number of tasks that must be performed, working hours that surpass their contractual ones, and the demand for improvement of educational practices are all factors that contribute to teachers' work precarization, impacting their identities and the relationships between school, students, and society.

3 THE PRECARIZATION OF TEACHERS' WORK AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY OBSTACLES

The educational reforms in Latin America brought significant changes to education professionals (Oliveira, 2004), both in terms of school organization and of their job description. Such reforms "change not just schools, but the entire system, with profound impacts on the very nature of work at schools" (Oliveira, 2004, p. 1128) as a consequence of the sort of society, of school, and of man that those reforms seek to promote and implement.

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[4] Power is a key concept in Sociology studies; it has a variety of divergent interpretations. The most commonly adopted definition is Max Weber's, according to which power is the ability to control individuals, events, or resources – to impose one's will and triumph any obstacles, resistance, or opposition. Although it may be used to control people or events, power can also be used in subtler, less direct fashions, such as the ability to refrain from acting (i. e. when a parent denies his child love, or when a government denies its poor financial aid), as well as the ability to shape people's values and beliefs by controlling the media and educational institutions. (Johnson, 1997, p. 177).

Educational policy brought changes to the structure upon which schools are organized, as well as to teachers' work, demobilizing political actions and itineraries and thus disrupting school autonomy by impacting school dynamics such as democratic management and the collective creation of each school's pedagogical-political project; in short, by affecting that which allowed each school to identify itself as part of its unique reality. These issues can be traced back to the managerial-based reforms implemented during the 1980's and 1990's. According to Oliveira (2004, p. 1132):

> [...] the reforming movement that gains traction in Latin America in the 1990's and produces a new regulation of educational policy has significant consequences to schools' organization and management, restructuring teachers' work in ways that might affect its nature and definition. Teachers' work is no longer defined as a classroom activity; it now also comprehends school management, insofar as teachers must participate in planning activities, project formulation, and in collective discussions about syllabi and evaluation. Teachers' work becomes broader and in consequence its analysis tends to become more complex.

The rise of neoliberalism has intensified work relationships at school and shaped the dismaying work environment where education professionals were to act; work precarization was compounded by the multiple tasks to be performed, as well as by the lack of basic infrastructure to accomplish those tasks, in addition to the excessive workload, seen as how "work dynamics were targeted by neoliberal actions, which resulted in growing precarization of work and in the formation of a reserve army of labor to serve the needs of productive capital, increasingly subjected to the logic of financial dominance" (Pochmann, 2020, p, 36).

In Martins' (1994) eyes, educational policy shapes the construction of a societal model as it informs principles, social paradigms, and their implementation and dissemination. From this standpoint, policy implementation must consider the dialogue between the concepts of society and school that were established in the formulation of government programs and projects. Santos and Jakobsen (2020) believe that the State's systemic structures help overcome its crisis and intensify the precarization of workers' lives in order to achieve its social projects.

In education, worker exploitation and the precarization of multifunction work were aggravated by the neoliberal handbook (Pochmann, 2020), promoting job insecurity and outsourcing, which is supported by the privatization of education services – thus evidencing the system's idea of emergency exits.

We would like to stress that even during "normal" times, when teaching in-school classes, teachers' work is intense and must meet multiple demands from the educational system. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this pre-existing complexity is compounded further: in addition to the multi-dimensionality of teachers' work, they must also deal with the social disparities and wealth concentration that permeate their working

conditions on account of being a structural component of public school students' lives; those elements "are intensified by the current capitalist hoarding mechanisms, are a result of changes in production associated to the new liberal-financial hegemony, and produce the deterioration of the 'social issue' and its manifold expressions in the lives of working class citizens" (Yazbek; Raichelis; Sant'ana, 2020, p. 208).

Under these conditions, education professionals face excessive demands; they are supposed to be the ones who effectively make students stay in virtual classrooms and WhatsApp group chats (Oliveira; Pereira Junior, 2020), thus meeting the demands of a system that does not provide the basic conditions for their professional activity nor for their students' success. Saviani and Galvão (2021, p. 39) stress that "after the pandemic, market interests might use the experience of remote 'teaching' to argue in favor of 'uber-ized' teaching", accentuating "the trend of converting education into a good, in line with privatization initiatives".

The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers' work are rooted on access to communications technology, which is often hindered by teachers' precarious education and professional development, and also by financial impediments to obtain/use smartphones, notebook computers, Internet networks, digital platforms, etc. Referring to the reality imposed by the pandemic, Sena (2020) writes that teachers are not required to be reflexive nor attentive to the challenges posed by the context, but software experts instead.

In the educational model imposed by the current circumstances, teachers are seen as replicators of techniques and rules who use technology to reach a goal; this fails to take into account the fact that most technological resources that became must-haves for education at present (such as virtual learning environments, digital platforms, and virtual classrooms) were rarely ever used at public schools before – they were not a part of that formative context nor of teachers' daily activities. This conflict impacts the actions of education professionals. In Sena's (2020, p. 196-197) words:

> Here it is worth noting that in this format, the act of teaching gradually becomes disconnected from the social and cultural dimensions that are integral to the organization of a school's pedagogic work (its political-pedagogical project, its syllabus, the planning, and supervision of the use of financial resources by school councils, teacher staff meetings and parent-teacher conferences, recess, cultural celebrations, artistic and interactive activities, and sports).

Social spaces and educational priorities have acquired new meanings. A new culture is brewing in schools, defined by the limitations imposed by the need to respect social distancing protocols. In order to meet system requirements, schools and school systems have implemented remote teaching at public schools without taking into account the actual possibilities of students and education professionals. The development of that educational

model failed to consider professionals' structural situation, the multiple demands on their time, their emotional health, and whether they were effectively able to teach remote classes.

In Oliveira and Pereira Junior's (2020, p. 208) critique of this situation, they argue that:

> This unprecedented context has highlighted the social and educational disparities against which Brazil has long struggled, revealing a complex challenge: both teachers and students lack access to technological infrastructure (devices and support), teachers are inexperienced and have no previous training to use the technologies involved in remote teaching, and many families face precarious conditions – they are not just unable to provide a minimally suitable studying environment, but also rely on school meals to feed their children.

Education professionals realize that this complex situation they have been forced into poses many challenges. The technologically-mediated social interaction model requires a different set of skills than the ones historically used by teachers, leading to poor performances from students and teachers alike, due to the many reasons discussed above. On the basis of such observations, we believe that, owed to a lack of technological infrastructure and training, education professionals have not been and are not being prepared to act in their new working conditions. These elements cause professional struggles that impact teachers' identity and how teachers act when faced with the new demands.

The pandemic has compounded the precarization of teachers' work, contributing to the debate on the need to reflect upon the topic of professional performance in complex settings. From this standpoint, the intensification of teachers' work resulting from the current productive restructuring efforts has as its some of its key components "working ties and contractual relationships; working conditions, work organization; precarization of workers' health; decline of social acknowledgment, symbolic appreciation, and of the process of establishing teachers' individual and collective professional identities; and collective representation and organization." (Souza, 2020, p. 3).

The precarization of teachers' work is already in process. Thus, detecting the main obstacles experienced by education professionals will require sensitive listening, which is the goal of the next section of this study.

4   REFLECTING UPON PRECARIZATION: TEACHERS' VOICES

Our research participants are public school teachers who work in the city of Maceió. In order to comply with social distancing guidelines, data were gathered through an online Google Forms questionnaire. After setting up the questionnaire, we sent its URL address to

the WhatsApp group chat of school coordinators and managers and asked them to forward it to the teachers who worked at their schools. The questionnaire was answered by 120 (one hundred and twenty) respondents over 15 (fifteen) days, providing us with participants' views.

As already indicated, all Maceió public school teachers were invited to be involved in the research; thus, we had respondents across all educational levels and modalities. Research participants are: 28 (twenty-eight) preschool teachers; 69 (sixty-nine) elementary school teachers; 13 middle school teachers; 6 (six) Adult basic education teachers; and 4 (four) Adult secondary education teachers.

In regard to their teacher education, the group is highly heterogeneous; the most frequent backgrounds are teaching (a technical course) and Bachelor degrees in Education, Dramatic Arts, Physical Education, History, Philosophy, English and Portuguese, Geography, and Biology. Many respondents declared having bachelor's degrees but did not specify in which areas.

When asked about further degrees, respondents reported specializing in a variety of areas such as: School Management; Pedagogical Coordination; Institutional and Clinical Psychopedagogy; Inclusion and Education of Special Needs Students; Technology in Education; Environmental Education; Teaching Strategies to Use ICT in K-12 Education; Higher Education Teaching; Adult Education; Organizational Education; Portuguese and Literature; Plastic Arts; Diversity and Gender at School; Exercise Physiology; Human Rights Education; Brazilian Geography; Literacy; Dance Teaching; Rural Education; Art, Education, and Society; Education, Work, Rural Development and Occupational Safety. Only 4 (four) respondents declared having Master's degrees – 3 (three) in Education and 1 (one) in Mathematics and Physics Teaching Methodologies.

Respondents' time working at Maceió public schools was organized into the following scale: 1-5 years: thirty-four respondents; 7-10 years: five respondents; 10-15 years: forty-six respondents; over 15 years: thirty-five respondents. This indicates that most research participants have plenty of teaching experience.

According to the 2018 School Census, there are 140 (one-hundred and forty) schools in Maceió, one of which is located at a rural area. Maceió public schools cater to several education levels and modalities: Early Childhood (daycare and preschool), Elementary and Middle School, Adult Education and Special Needs Education. Table 1 illustrates shows the number of students enrolled in 2018.

Table 1 – Number of Maceió public school students enrolled in 2018.

Education Level/Modality	No. of students

Early childhood (Daycare)	2,733
Early childhood (Preschool)	5,619
Elementary School	25,823
Middle School	5,012
Adult Education	7,008
Special Needs Education	3,595
TOTAL	49,790

Source: 2018 School Census / INEP, 2018 <>https://www.qedu.org.br/cidade/5405-maceio/censo-escolar>

The 2018 School Census illuminates other dimensions about the structural reality of Maceió public schools. Table 2 shows a list of school facilities.

Table 2 – Maceió Public School Facilities in 2018

Facility	No. of schools
Library	52
Kitchen	140
Informatics laboratory	7
Sports court	39
Reading Room	90
Director's Office	132
Teachers' Room / Staffroom	113
Special services room	78
Restrooms inside main school buildings	139
Restrooms outside main school buildings	131

Source: 2018 School Census / INEP, 2018 <>https://www.qedu.org.br/cidade/5405-maceio/censo-escolar>

Another relevant information to be found in the 2018 School Census is the fact that all schools provide meals to their students through the National School Meals Program, while 130 (one-hundred and thirty) schools also have potable water. In addition, only 55 (fifty-five) schools had accessibility adaptations to accommodate special needs students, and 66 had accessible restrooms.

The infrastructure of Maceió public schools is not an exception among Brazilian cities. Most schools function at buildings that could use renovations and enhancements to broaden the possibilities for school staff and students (Oliveira; Pereira Junior, 2020). This assessment relates to the evidence that, during the pandemic, public schools have trouble reconciling official guidelines with their actual possibilities, because working conditions are harsh; thus, "ignoring the profound social disparities and the circumstances imposed by the pandemic, 'distance education' and 'remote teaching' represented false solutions to avoid the interruption of K-12 and higher education activities" (Praun, 2020, p. 4).

The Maceió City Council's Education Committee (CCEC) has, through ordinance no. 069 (April 17th, 2020), instituted that remote teaching was to be adopted by all schools,

recommending that teachers worked from their homes using digital technologies and reaching students through social media and messaging applications such as WhatsApp. This followed the recommendations of the National Education Council (NEC), which turned discretionary the previously mandatory 200 schooldays per year but kept the 800 hours/year workload as a requirement.

When asked to evaluate the remote teaching model schools were required to adopt, 63 (sixty-three) respondents considered it acceptable; 14 (fourteen) considered it good; and 43 (forty-three) considered it terrible. Remote teaching was the alternative chosen to keep schools operating, with the double goal of 1) fulfilling one of the school's primary social functions – the school-family-society interaction, and 2) providing a response to the system's demands that schools and their agents developed some sort of professional activity, so as to justify their salaries (Colemarx, 2020).

After data were collected and studied using analytical categories, the general picture emerging from the analysis is that the difficulties reported by the Maceió public school teachers can be grouped into two sets of distinct but interrelated aspects. The first set of difficulties has to do with structural conditions faced by students and teachers themselves, while the second has to do with the social disparities that constitute a major aspect of the researched phenomenon. Teachers[5] stressed that:

> Our students, most of them don't have the means to use a computer or a smartphone, their parents aren't very involved, and many of the parents can't read.

> Lack of technological resources for students and teachers. Even the simplest things, like a cellphone.

> Lack of access on the student's part; my lack of skills to deal with technology, and no technical resources were made available by the CCEC.

> Most students have no Internet access and the phone they use is their parents'. Most students have to wait until their parents get home from work to do the assignments and listen to the teacher's explanation.

> Students' Internet access isn't good enough, lack of resources provided by the CCEC, seen as how all equipment used by teachers were our personal devices, and those did not always meet the technical requirements for remote classes.

> Lack of feedback and family interest in their kids' development – they never said why they refused to engage in the interactive assignments. Also, us teachers lacked devices and had no training to record and edit videos.

> A LOT. Remote teaching was complicated because students' Internet connection wasn't good enough to receive video calls. The ones who had phones, their devices couldn't download the lesson videos, and parents had a single phone that had to be shared by all of their children!

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[5] As the participants have provided similar answers, we tried to select excerpts that completed each other and summed up the prevalent statements. On account of the high number of responses, we have chosen not to codify them.

Working conditions are nearly non-existent for public school staff. During the pandemic, specific infrastructure and supplies are required if professionals are to be able to do their jobs properly (Oliveira; Pereira Junior, 2020). In addition, as the one responsible for executing social policy, the State must provide Internet to all students (Colemarx, 2020) so as to guarantee that constitutional rights are being respected.

The neoliberal logic is wicked, especially when the State washes its hands from its duties while simultaneously demanding results from educational agents to comply with market demands and with the logic imposed by international organizations, failing to consider the complex context of pedagogic spaces, learning processes, and knowledge production (Santos Neto; Araújo, 2021) and merely imposing rules without providing the bare minimum to make them feasible.

The difficulties listed by education professionals in the first set of answers are concrete signs of the reality faced by public schools over time. It is impossible to work when the basic requirements for one's tasks are not provided. Another obstacle revealed by our research was the way the CCEC handled the operationalization of educational policy, specifically regarding their duty to provide education professionals with the basic requirements to fulfill their role of articulating school-society policies.

According to research participants, remote teaching did not happen in Maceió on account of the system's multiple inadequacies. This raised tensions between the governmental guidelines and the reality of the local school community. According to teachers, educators were swamped by activities, research, and orientations, but none of those actions could provide a structural solution to the problem, which is rooted on the second set of answers, centered on social disparities, given that "the experiments conducted over the past few months have made even more glaring the multiple dimensions of social disparity in Brazil" (Praun, 2020, p. 4).

The testimonies quoted below sum up the complexities of implementing remote teaching with students who face harsh living conditions:

> Students' socio-economic situation has compromised the whole process, because most of them did not have and do not have the means to successfully study in this modality.
>
> The use of digital devices by students. They are poor, they live in poor neighborhoods, and they have no access to that sort of thing.
>
> Internet access, precarious technological devices, social disparities, precarious family structures.
>
> They had no Internet, no cellphones, no resources; the ones who had cellphones couldn't download videos due to lack of device memory; illiterate parents, the

children's and parents' schedules didn't match, students didn't always have a phone with them, they had no money for photocopies, they didn't know how to do course activities, didn't understand the activities.

Students' financial situation, the fact that many of them are living really close to the poverty line, and in addition many of them had no devices (computer, cellphone), which complicated learning.

Having to quickly learn how to use technologies without any help, students' social situation, their lack of Internet, cellphone, and computers, parents and students didn't interact.

Social disparities, the reason why many students did not have Internet access or technological devices.

Students' Internet access and digital devices were precarious; studying quarters were limited, because many family members were sharing a small space; family members had trouble helping their children study, because many of them were unfamiliar with the subjects themselves.

The social disparity phenomenon is a direct consequence of the political structure of our society, and as a result of that organization, education is not exempt from it. Generally speaking, social policy borne from public policy are mechanisms intended to soften the struggles imposed by our political and social structure (Demo, 1994), which are especially felt by the citizens who face extreme poverty.

Considering the context outlined above, remote teaching requires basic elements that are a part of many people's everyday lives. However, as social distancing was adopted by public schools, it became clear that students' families lack basic survival necessities such as food and potable water. In Colemarx's (2020) eyes, the Brazilian State has proved itself inefficient in providing its citizens with the bare minimum to survive and has therefore failed to fulfill its constitutional role as the provider of public education for all, as per the 1988 Constitution. Thus, "the choice of strategies to replace in-person classes represents an ethical compromise, because those strategies presuppose the naturalization of the idea that a number of students will be unable to attend school, an issue caused by the disparities in living conditions, access to technology and to an Internet connection" (Colemarx, 2020, p. 21).

Social distancing has brought to light Brazilian families' daily struggle to survive; during the pandemic, the priority was protecting lives, and in this complex situation, further compounded by the lack of infrastructure, it was impossible to guide students. Teachers' words show a remarkable understanding of the reality faced by students and their families, making it clear that these are sensitive times that everyone wishes to overcome. However, "capitalism's unequal development reveals its wickedness towards small business owners and precarious, uber-ized, outsourced workers, alongside the broad morphology of work

relationships that characterizes the real life of those who do not own goods." (Colemarx, 2020, p. 6), including the family members of public school students and education professionals.

In addition to the evidence about students' reality and how remote teaching played out in the context of Maceió public schools, teachers' answers to the questionnaire have shown an increase in work-related activities. 87 (eighty-seven) respondents declared they had more work to do; 24 (twenty-four) declared there had been no change, and 9 (nine) said that they did not notice any increase in the workload.

However, even though 33 (thirty-three) respondents declared there had not been/they had not noticed an increase in the workload, they contradicted this initial assessment when asked to describe their work as remote teachers: respondents' answers unanimously showed that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified teachers' work. In their words:

> It was a lot happening at once, a lot of training, keeping track of activities, helping students, since many of them only did the activities on weekends, there were a lot of activity-related surveys to be sent through zap [WhatsApp].

> The time required to plan classes, create assignments using Google Forms, record and edit videos, etc.

> Looking for resources that met students' needs, one-on-one help for students via WhatsApp, Meetings, Writing Reports, etc.

> Teachers had to find digital tools to record their lessons in an attempt to reach students, so we had to research and learn how to use technological resources. Recording a video takes up a lot of time, we have to research, make it, then edit it, before it can be sent to students.
> We had to keep asking students to do their assignments, keep encouraging them to study. We have to make parents encourage their kids to want to study remotely. Very difficult, most of them don't get it.

> CCEC had training sessions every 2 weeks or once a month, then at even shorter intervals, and they required us to complete many assignments. A lot of lives*[6] to watch (in the morning, in the afternoon, at night, on Saturdays, Sundays, and holy days...); learning how to use technological tools and devices overnight. A teacher's cellphone and computer were no longer his own, it belonged to the CCEC.

> Each teacher had to come up with ways to get families to interact with them. Recording videos and meeting parents outside working hours, they kept asking when we would resume in-person classes and were especially interested in the delivery of the meal kits. Teachers had to bring the school home, with all of its problems, and those only got worse during the pandemic.

> Reports, trainings, meetings, planning, preparing videos, organizing assignments and sending them through our phones, constantly worrying over difficulties. A tangle of feelings... Fear, insecurity... It was a tough year!

> Remote teaching had no working hours A lot of classes, meetings, trainings, etc. Information coming in all the time. Long hours exposed to computer/cellphone light. Fear of being contaminated by the virus. Uncertainty. A lot of things got harder.

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[6] Shorthand for 'live online conferences and lectures'. From here on out, this shorthand will be indicated by an asterisk after the term live*.

> There were countless meetings guiding our work, weekly meetings that we had to attend, collective work hours to help planning, a lot of trainings, a lot of courses offered by the CCEC... it was just a lot to handle. I was very anxious, stressed out...

> Creating activities that balanced information and reading encouragement, better understanding and execution, helping students, the need to provide constant, often personalized feedback.

It is possible to read these answers as education professionals venting about their experiences and the multiple responsibilities that come with remote teaching. Saviani e Galvão (2021) believe that in this context, teachers' professionalization is abandoned in favor of aggravating the 'uber-ization' of the teaching profession. Generally speaking, teachers are called to work and to reach out to students through social media and messaging apps to comply with State-imposed rules, which impacts "several dimensions of their lives: personal, social, economic, cultural, and professional, compounding disparities during this crisis" (Gonçalves, *et al.*, 2020, p. 22).

Teachers' working hours became longer and work has "invaded" their private and family lives as they were made to be permanently on call for school needs. The system has imposed the rules, and the working class could not fight them, even though those rules failed to consider the context of public school education professionals and students, who suffer the most with this remote teaching model. Thus, teachers are visibly exhausted by the multiple demands, which results in anxiety and burnout (Praun, 2020), both of which exceed the complex working conditions of our day and age.

According to Sena (2020, p. 214), teachers "have doubled their workload, using their private/family time to be available to students, parents, directors, and coordinators via messaging apps, which know no working hours and overload teachers"; in addition, they must also plan and develop their activities, participate in countless virtual meetings and lives* they are required to attend (Sena, 2020). Participants' answers reveal their precarious working conditions and how teachers' work has increased during these exceptional times:

> Studying and research to deal with the new teaching reality. To be constantly trying to get parents to help their children. Coming up with different sorts of activities so that one can bring results, can be interesting, and most importantly, can be done by children remotely. Many hours on the cellphone so that I can accommodate students' schedules.

> Interacting with the children took much longer than planned, both because of the time it took t create activities (research, making videos and audios), and also because the few children who did interact weren't always able to be present at the time the activities were supposed to be handed in, so they often contacted me outside class hours, or at night, or even on weekends, because all of them had to use the device of an adult who spent the day working.

> Students would reach out to us at all hours, and we had to reply so as to not leave them without an answer, without attention.
> Researching various strategies to reach as many students as possible, trying to raise parents' awareness and get them to become our partners, recording, editing, setting up assignments, then inevitably getting frustrated at how few students interacted, and beginning everything all over again.
>
> An increase in hours spent accessing videos and studies online, having to quickly adapt to a new routine, physical exhaustion, eye strain, gigantic groups in meeting platforms, reading documents, recording lessons, etc.
>
> Too many lives*. On top of everything we had to adapt to, during a time when we were psychologically shaken due to the pandemic, there seemed to be a lot of pressure on teachers.
>
> Students who were available at different times because they had to use their parents' cellphones; constantly storing and editing images; daily researching different activities that were in accordance with the National Common Syllabus Base, lack of digital textbooks with activities and an in-print counterpart for students.
>
> Researching to create satisfactory and productive classes, recording videos after 9 p. m. because it was too noisy during the day, editing audio and video files, constantly researching, trainings, courses, lives*, and lectures every day.
>
> Preparing online resources with more images, texts, and activities that were a better fit for the new context. Preparing video-lessons. Taking courses to learn how to use the online classroom tools. All of it was exhausting, I didn't know how to do any of it and had to spend long hours preparing. I'd like to stress that those preparations were specific to teaching each year, and there was no real support. Not to mention the reports required by the CCEC. I used to open the online classroom at 14:00 and close it at 22:00 so that as many students as possible would be able to access it. And I would be on call.

These answers show that participants were striving to improve their professional performance as a response to the changes in teachers' job description imposed by the current context. Aside from the cornerstone topic of teacher education, these professionals are clearly willing to be available to their students and their parents outside their contractual working hours. Overall, teachers' work has become more demanding and the pressure to seek new didactic-pedagogical knowledge has become a trivial element of their professional praxis.

As Santos and Jakobsen (2020, p. 19) explain, "the structural adjustments caused by neoliberal economic opening policies, privatizations, and the implantation of global production chains" has contributed to the process of holding workers responsible for their own working conditions and having new demands be presented to them by the State as something that is part of their job description, justifying this sort of maneuver with "the exponential unemployment rates and the growing instability of the job market, with a marked increase of informal, precarious, temporary, and intermittent occupations, as well as self-employed people and people who perform domestic jobs".

On the basis of such observations, we may question the time boundaries of the remote teaching model, in which there is no definition of place, time, and tasks involved in one's job. Another key element is the work overload required to fulfill all tasks, since in addition to their normal daily tasks, concerns about their mental health, their families, and the consequences of social isolation, teachers are exposed to daily demands in the name of a capitalism tenet: efficiency.

Therefore, "there is undeniably a work overload during the pandemic" (Oliveira, Pereira Junior, 2020, p. 226) as a result of various causes, especially 1) teachers had trouble adapting to the proposed model, on account of not owning/not knowing how to use technological resources, 2) students' difficulty to participate on online classes, and 3) the system's multiple demands (Oliveira, Pereira Junior, 2020).

5   CONCLUSION

The restructuring of work by political reforms has caused the development of different modalities of employer-employee relationship. Rather than being restricted to private companies, these modalities have also influenced the public sector, schools included, and have contributed to the intensification of teachers' work and to those professionals being held accountable for State-mandated results; thus, educational policy has reorganized teachers' actions.

Regarding our research goal of analyzing the working conditions of public school teachers in the city of Maceió during the pandemic, we were able to ascertain that these professionals are facing complex working conditions connected to the social and political repercussions of this health crisis on society as a whole. Therefore, the educational policy guidelines converge with the education model conceived for the current situation, failing to take into account the reality of the public school and its public.

From this standpoint, education is regarded as a field in the making, whose goal is to confirm the positions held by the current elected rulers, which yields a certain model of society and of education. This model has a clear impact in schools' day-to-day operations, in their organizational times and dynamics, interfering with their autonomy and with the creation of educational practices that befit the reality of schools, their students, and staff.

In short, the key results of this research show that teachers have faced a context of intensified work permeated by several educational issues caused by the lack of the technological infrastructure required for educational practices; in addition, our findings unveil how social disparities directly influence the work done at schools. In this regard, business

logic and management models do not promote a public education model that defends its public, nor the legal guidelines, instead forcing teachers and students to adopt practices that have very little to do with the social experiences of public school members.

The complex scenario imposed by the pandemic has brought up the need to see public spaces in a new light, to search for educational policy that can provide equal school experiences and opportunities for all, thus ensuring the constitutional right to education. Therefore, we must urgently defend a public school model that is sensitive to its agents' histories and wishes, thereby materializing a democratic and participative model of education and society that caters to social needs over capital's demands. This is the challenge ahead of us.

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