

## **“Teaching those who do not want to learn”: one of the challenges of Didactics and Teacher Training** <sup>1 2 3</sup>

### ***“Ensinar para quem não quer aprender”: um dos desafios da didática e da formação de professores***

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#### **Abstract**

This article builds on the expression “teaching those who do not want to learn” that is consolidated in the perceptions of high school teachers as one of the greatest challenges of the teaching-learning process in public schools. The data is part of a study on teaching for young people from peripheral regions. The objectives are to see the reality of these “students who do not want to learn”; identify how teachers can overcome this reality and promote meanings for the school; to recognize new dimensions of teaching practice to be incorporated by the teaching of Didactics and Teacher training. The argument is based on Didactics and Sociology studies. It is argued that a new teaching professionalism is marked by the relational and motivational dimensions of work, in which the teacher is a “relationship professional” and a “builder of meaning”.

**Keywords:** good teacher, didactics, high school, professionalism

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## **Resumo**

*Este artigo se estrutura a partir da expressão “ensinar para quem não quer aprender”, que se consolidou nas percepções de professores de ensino médio como um dos maiores desafios do processo ensino-aprendizagem em escolas públicas. Os dados são parte de um estudo sobre o exercício da docência com jovens da periferia. Os objetivos são constatar a realidade desses “alunos que não querem aprender”; identificar como os professores conseguem driblar essa realidade e promover sentidos para a escola; reconhecer novas dimensões da prática docente a serem incorporadas pelo ensino da didática e pela formação de professores. A construção argumentativa apoia-se nos estudos da didática e da sociologia. Argumenta-se que uma nova profissionalidade docente encontra-se marcada pelas dimensões relacionais e motivacionais do trabalho, na qual o professor é um “profissional das relações” e um “construtor de sentidos”.*

**Palavras-chave:** bom professor, didática, ensino médio, profissionalidade

## **Introduction**

School today is integrated in a contemporary society marked by many changes in the social, economic, political, technological, and scientific spheres. Besides this, K-12 education is structured in a scenario of ample access to new population segments, aiming education effectiveness. In high school, mainly aimed at young people, accumulate the conflicts of this life phase, the questions about the future, and the legitimacy of school as formative institutions.

This article is structured from the expression “teaching those who do want to learn” that was consolidated on the discourse of high school teachers as one of the main challenges of the teaching-learning process in public schools. From the data of the research done between 2014-2016 entitled “The practice of teaching in high school: the centrality of the teacher's role in working with young people in the periphery”, teachers and students offered important indicators to reflect on teaching practice, teaching work, pre-service training, and the role of teaching in the current context of a high school that is accused of being in crises. It is a study with teachers recognized as “those who make a difference” due to the success of their classes when dealing with young people from the outskirts and the good results in the teaching-learning process in the researched school.

The data was produced from a field research in a school in the periphery of *Baixada Fluminense*, state of Rio de Janeiro, with good results in external evaluations and seen as a prestigious institution in the region. We applied an open-ended questionnaire to 341 students in the senior year of high school, in which they gave their opinion on the characteristics of a “good class” and a “good teacher” and indicated the teachers they recognized as having such characteristics. From that on, we observed, for three months, 60 hours of classes of those teachers (two of Mathematics, one of Portuguese, and one of History), and conducted interviews with them to identify teachers’ perceptions on their practice. The school administrators were also interviewed to establish a dialogue with the perception of the students and teachers on what is a “good teacher” and a “good class”. Besides this, we applied a questionnaire with 69 teachers out of the 80 teaching high school in the researched school to identify the main challenges of teaching in this phase of K-12 education and compare them with the perceptions and actions of the teachers appointed by the students as “good teachers”. We highlight that the expression “good teacher” used in this text is a native expression, brought up by the researched students when indicating the teachers that “made a difference” in the daily school life. The option to use the term “good teacher” aims to create a distance between the rationalization of teachers’ action and to overcome the performative perspective of the work, sometimes associated to the research on teacher performance.

In this article, we try to find the impacts of the “students who do not want to learn” on the teaching-learning process; identify how the teachers in their teaching practice can overcome this reality and promote meanings to the school, as well as try to recognize new dimensions of teacher practice to be incorporated in the didactic teaching and teacher training.

Within a theoretical-analytical perspective, we propose to integrate three axes: teaching-learning process, didactics, and teacher training, to reach the objectives of this article. We assume that our object is the teaching-learning process (Candau, 2012), or better, the processes, as there is no unique model of teaching or learning. We understand, in a first analysis, that it is not possible to understand teaching without learning and, therefore, didactic must search alternatives to the problems in pedagogical practice. In the pre- and in-service teacher training, the didactic is consolidated as a connection between theory and practice, allowing teachers to acquire and perfect knowledge, abilities, and dispositions in their teaching practice, so as to improve the quality of the education the students receive.

The argumentative construction developed through the text is also part of the data produced in the research field on didactic fundamentals (Candau, 2012; 2016; André & Cruz, 2012); sociology (Dubet 1994; 2002; Formosinho, 2009), and teacher training (Gatti, 2010; 2016; Nóvoa, 2014). Through the interpretations, we try to overcome a simply dichotomic perspective trying to integrate macro and micro approaches, objectivity and subjectivity, theory and practice.

However, the protagonism highlighted in this article is that of the teachers and their teaching practices in the real context of high school. According to Tardif and Lessard (2005), “one needs to take into account what teachers do and not what they should do”. In a study on teachers’ actions in high school, Fanfani (2010) notices that new problems are brought to teaching, among those, dealing with the lack of interest of young people faced by the content of school syllabus and the need of building teachers’ authority through the teaching-student relationship.

Besides this, André and Cruz (2012) find that many studies in the area of didactic focus on the school routine as a whole, but leave being the classroom specificities. In this case, this work tries to overcome this gap by presenting data on the classroom dynamic and the practice of teachers’ training. Organization wise, this text is structured around four guiding questions: what is the reality of those “students that do not want to learn”? “how to teach those that do not want to learn”? “ what is the place of didactics in this debate? All and none”; “how does one learn to be a teacher in school today?”.

## **What is the reality of the “students who do not want to learn”?**

Trying to answer this question we present three findings on the reality of high school, school, and students.

The first finding is based on the low indexes of learning and the little progress done in the last years, mainly in the secondary education which encompass the second part of elementary education and high school, attending teenagers and youngsters between 11 and 17 years old (table 1) .

**Table 1 – Ideb in Brazil per school segment – 2009 to 2015**

	2009		2011		2013		2015	
	Public schools	Private schools						
<b>Elementary School I</b>	4.4	6.4	4.7	6.5	4.9	6.7	5.3	6.8
<b>Elementary school II</b>	3.7	5.9	3.9	6.0	4.0	5.9	4.2	6.1
<b>High School</b>	3.4	5.6	3.4	5.7	3.4	5.4	3.5	5.3

Source: MEC/Inep

What is wrong in the process of teaching-learning? The access to elementary school II and high school has increased, with a higher number of enrollments and a higher attendance rate, but there is a problem regarding the lack of quality.

When reflecting on Brazilian educational system, it is a consensus on the perception that high school is the educational level that provokes the most controversial debates, be it through the persistent problems of access and permanence, be it regarding the quality of the education offered, or even the discussion on identity (Krawczyk, 2011, p. 754).

What is quality? Quality is a polysemic concept, associated with the purposes of education and the definition of its social role which vary according to the groups of interest. To Krawczyk (2011), when two people talk about quality in education, they are not always saying the same thing. The notion of quality is a historically and socially built concept and subject to constant negotiations. The author argues that if we understand crises as a moment that defines a situation of tension, dispute, and conflict, we can say that high school is under a crisis and the same takes place in what we understand as quality in education.

However, regardless of the reference matrix or the purpose of school education defended, one idea seems to be common in all study lines, “the school lives under a crisis on the quality of education”. Be it because the student is not interested in school, or because the contents do not follow reality, or for the lack of human and pedagogical resources, that is, the discrepancy of school format. Today, we search the quality of school education, to secure a better learning and decrease on retention and dropout rates.

It is possible to identify in the data produced by standardized tests (Saeb, Pisa<sup>4</sup>) that, mainly, secondary students are not learning. In Brazil, according to the *Prova Brasil 2015*, only 14% of young people enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of public schools (municipal and state ones) learned what is appropriate in Mathematics (under the criterium: problem-solving competence). In the states of Amapá, Maranhão, and Alagoas, only 3%, 5%, and 6% (respectively) of the students finishing elementary school II in the public system reach the learning expected by this subject. Besides this, the best proficiency levels expected in Mathematics in this educational level, reached by the states of Santa Catarina and Minas Gerais, do not overpass 24% of students.

Regarding high school in the country, the indicators of *Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica* (Ideb- Index of the development of K-12 education) that combine performance data (*Prova Brasil*) and the flow (approval rate) are stagnated in the public and private systems (table 2).

**Table 2 – Comparative on the results of Ideb and its components (2009-2015)**

	2009		2011		2013		2015	
	State schools	Private schools						
<b>Ideb-Brazil</b>	3.4	5.6	3.4	5.4	3.4	5.7	3.5	5.3
<b>Flow*-Brazil</b>	0.78	0.93	0.82	0.93	0.73	0.94	0.82	0.95
<b>Performance-Brazil**</b>	4.34	5.96	4.19	5.79	4.32	6.05	4.25	5.64

Source: MEC/INEP. QEdU ([www.qedu.org.br](http://www.qedu.org.br)) \*The higher the value, the higher the approval"; \*\*The higher the grade, the higher the learning.

How can this reality be explained? Why do students, after spending between nine and twelve years at school, do not learn? A second finding can contribute to the explanation of these indexes. We can see that faced by the universalization of elementary school and the expansion of high school, the admission of low-income classes in the school establish a conflict of interests between the students and the objectives of this school, which trigger contradictions, ‘disenchantments’, and “students who do not want to learn”.

<sup>4</sup> SAEB – *Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica*- Evaluation System for Basic Education; PISA – Programme for International Student Assessment

There are many uninterested people when they reach high school. I think this is very specific of teenagers as a whole and then we enter in a much deeper discussion on what would be the school format. Unfortunately, our school format didn't evolve with the generations. So we don't have a format that is adequate for young people today, who are multiple (Teacher Ana).

In the investigated school, out of the 69 teachers who answered the questionnaire, 62 (around 90%) point to low indexes of learning as one of the main problems of high school. However, 65 teachers (around 94%) also attributed these results to the lack of interest of young people in school. What is the reason of this lack of interest?

We identify in the research on youth and school (Krawczyk, 2009; Brenner & Carrano, 2014) that school was not established targeting the new students arriving, a result of a new social morphology and the new cultures that shock with school tradition and teachers themselves. Such school reality can be called *mass school* characterized by Formosinho (2009) as a school of great heterogeneity of students and contexts, heterogeneity of teachers, an organizational complexity that demands structural and pedagogical changes.

To broaden such findings, we start from the arguments of two authors: Dubet (1994; 2002), with his thesis of institutional declines, and Charlot (1996), with the debate on the meanings of school. Though both are in a French context, the focus of these research were young people from low-income classes and public schools, allowing an approximation to Brazilian reality.

According to Dubet (2002), we can see the decadence of the institutional program of the school as well as the clear definition of roles played within it by the different authors (teachers, students, administrators), questioning the power of institutional socialization, its methods, and models, pointing to subjects as an important part of this new process.

National studies (Brenner & Carrano, 2014) point out that young people who started to attend public secondary school, targeted to the masses, have divergent relations with the knowledge legitimized by it through the years. Differently from the students of the elites and even the middle classes, which value the propaedeutic character of high school, youngsters from low-income classes question the usefulness of the knowledge taught. It is related to antagonist perspectives, or even absent, regarding the future they aim and their own self-esteem.

However, it is not simply to affirm that school has lost its legitimacy, because families and society as a whole still place their bets in school. What is questioned is the way its subjects attribute meaning to it, as they are not taught in a unified format. There is an increasing distance between the social expectations placed in school and its possibilities of becoming reality. In this context, the diverse manifestations of students' refusal to learn assume different forms, such as absenteeism, indiscipline, dispersion, and dropout, pointed out by the studies of Lelis (2012).

The third finding is supported by the studies of Charlot (1996), when affirming that school needs to make sense so that students can study and learn, that is, to have a meaning to them, as the students learn when they can create a meaning and appropriate knowledge in any circumstance.

Often students are resistant or passive regarding most contents taught and considered by them as having no practical meaning and that have no use in their daily lives. Such relation with knowledge leads to serious conflicts with the school and even with the teachers, who labels them as uninterested youngsters and with no perspective of future.

In the school investigated, 91.3% of the teachers (63 out of 69) affirm that students do not value school knowledge, and 78.3% consider that students' low self-esteem hinders their learning. However, what is the perspective of these young people on the relation with knowledge and the school?

The intersection of the data in the open-ended questions answered by the students and the interviews with the teachers and managers, as well as the classroom observations allowed the identification of two temporal situations regarding the meaning that young people assign to school. The first is shown in the admission of high school associated to the mobilization of attending this educational level, seen as a social obligation and a bet on school for social climbing

You don't want to study? Just remember you are poor (Junior year student).

Two words are almost unanimous among them: "school and future". Even though they are subjects who intensively live the moment, the issue of the future, even if utopically, is frequently present among young people. Most of them say that they have chosen to study in this school, with family support, due to references of quality, it being a rigorous, organized

school, with good teachers, focused on achieving good results, where students really learn, go to the university, and get good jobs.

It is, undoubtedly, an example of mobilization of young people towards school, who wish, based on the sense they attribute to them, to guarantee a better future. Thus, in their relationship with the future, these young people still see school as a guarantee towards social mobility, the improvement/maintenance of life conditions, and overcome parental social *status*, even if, in their daily lives, they might distance themselves from these ideals.

This search for social climbing and the relation with a better future, associate to the school role, makes it a social obligation to these young people from peripheral regions. There is a consensus that everyone needs to go to high school, differently from most of their parents who did not attend this educational level, as it can allow better possibilities of social mobility.

However, after their admission in high school, a second situation takes place: young people conflict with school knowledge and the apparent mismatches with the multiple objectives of life of each young person, leading towards a mismatch with school and the need to find other meanings to it. The diversity of social, cultural, or economic conditions of these youngsters who enter in school gives multiple meanings to it. Besides this, the types of knowledge necessary to be admitted in the university or jobs, associated to the desired social climbing, do not seem to support students' "want to learn" in their daily lives. The research shows that the emphasis on sociability in the relationships with their classmates and teachers becomes one of the main meanings that students give to school.

We can see in the testimonies and observations that there is a re-elaboration of the school space by this young person who skips classes and values his/her group of friends in the schoolyard. When asked on what they would change in school, a group affirmed they wanted to "increase recess time", "have recreational activities", "have more outings" or even "keeping the same classes together during the years", answers similar to those found in the analysis of Charlot (1996) and Reis (2012) when finding that for young people of low-income classes in high school, the universe of knowledge and, more specifically, their universe of learning is centered on relational and affective learnings or connected to personal development.

The research shows the difficulty to reach a unique meaning given to school by these researched youngsters. However, the teachers indicated by the students as "good teachers"

will develop a reflexive stance towards this and search strategies to overcome this perspective, as will be shown next.

## How to teach those who do not want to learn?

Considering that in the high school classroom the teachers are the ones in the frontline of the process of teaching such heterogeneous groups of young people, knowing their strategies is a way to answer the question: “how to teach those who do not want to learn?”.

If “students do not want to learn” due to the lack of school meaning or the conflicts on what knowledge is valued, how do teacher articulate the scientific and school knowledge with those students, thus raising on them a “want to learn”? Students seem to have an answer when electing their “good teachers” and stating that the teacher is the key element to give meaning to learning.

Only the teacher can make me interest in the subject. The good teacher makes me learn. It is the teacher who shows me why I'm learning (Senior student).

Would the teacher be a builder of meanings? The authors Canário (2006) and Dubet (2002) say yes. To Canário (2006), understand the teacher as a *builder of meanings* is a new dimension of teachers' work that stands out by the need to establish a connection between school and the diversity of expectations and logics of actions present in increasingly diverse students. According to Dubet (2002), teaching work is legitimized through the relations, which is characterized by the *work on other* searching for the authenticity and the recognition of its practice over the other, in this case, high school students.

And how does the teacher become a builder of meanings? Teachers' explanations to students' lack of interest can contribute to the recognize pathways found to answer this question.

What is most difficult today is that the student doesn't want to learn. This is even a lack of respect towards the teacher, often...they look at you as if you were less, not with respect, as it was, with admiration. They sat “why do I have to learn this, teacher??” or “I'm not in the mood to receive this”. Sure this is not general, there are some who do want (High school Mathematics teacher).

This idea lack of respect towards the teacher”, associated with students’ lack of interest in school, is identified by most teachers in the questionnaires. Out of the 69 participants, 62 (89.9%) point out that the main difficulties for teachers’ work in high school were “disciplinary problems”. However, 80% (54 teachers/69) claim that most students respect school rules. Thus, what is the real scope of these disciplinary problems? In fact, what seems to be at stake in the claim that disciplinary problems are the greatest difficult for teachers’ action is the relation teacher-students or the so-called *class management*.

When observing the classes and interviewing managers and teachers, we could see that the greatest part of these “disciplinary problems” were related to the lack of students’ interest for the content, for the classes, and for the school average, leading to careless behaviors and the denial to do the activities, creating conflicts in the relationship with the teachers. Thus, the lack of preparation and interest by the students pointed out by 90% of teachers, may seem to be associated to indiscipline and the crises in the relationship with the students. Despite this, it was possible to identify that around 50% of the teachers (33/69) recognized that high school content is inadequate to students’ needs and that teachers lack the mastery of new knowledge (38/69) which could actually contribute to the construction of a learning meaning for those “uninterested” students.

By reinterpreting the scope of “disciplinary questions” it is possible to say that the researched teachers evidence the relational dimension as a singular condition for learning. As shown on Table 3, teachers point out the didactic aspects related to the availability of resources or the possibilities to make practical works are placed under the disciplinary/relational issues as difficulty factors.

**Table 3 – Main difficulties for teachers’ work in high school**

	% of agreement
Disciplinary problems caused by students	89.9
Time available to correct evaluations, activities, and exercises	83.8
Time available to develop content	81.2
Availability of didactic material	80.9
Experimental and practical work with students	78.8
Relationship with students’ families	76.1
Lack of personnel for pedagogical support	73.9
High rate of students’ absence	63.2
Work organization in the classroom	56.7
Mastery of new knowledge	55.1
Participation in pedagogical meetings	47.8
Relation with school direction	47.1

Source: Created by the author – Questionnaire answered by 69 teachers who could choose three options

In fact, we can conclude that the dispersion provoked by the lack of interest is the main justification presented by teachers for learning problems. This scenario provokes a relational crisis and the great difference in the results reached by teachers who can manage it. Themes such as *authority crises*, *respect*, *stress*, and *indiscipline* marked teachers’ discourse regarding high schoolers and the difficulties to manage the class. What sets apart the actions of the “good teachers” researched were the ways to deal with these difficulties and the learning results.

I think we must have the ability to present new things, especially in a school that has a social level as ours, in which they have no access to culture, to travel. We must get here with this proposal, to do something different, new ways of cultural expression, to show the world. With that, they listen, they get interested, and start to want that for them as well (High school History teacher).

But, how to do that? The reality of mass school demands the broadening of its social roles and of teaching itself. It shows the need for changes and the adoption of new guiding logics of pedagogical practice, focusing on classroom management. We identify in the action of the “good teachers” a search for these ‘logics’ that impact the concept of teachers’ role in the classroom.

This study, by comparing the justifications given by students to indicate “good teachers”, the observation of the practices of these teachers, and the interviews, identified two situations that have mostly influenced the effectiveness of teaching the reality presented: the *didactics in the classroom marked by the relationships* and *teacher’s motivational role*.

a) Didactics in the classroom marked by the relationships

In the research, it was possible to see teachers betting on the idea that in the work with the youngsters there is no space for a hierarchization, and the authoritarianism imposed for many years in the relationship teacher-students, in which the teacher was the holder of knowledge and the student a simple receptor. To the “good teachers” indicated by the students, the teaching authority was not something pre-conceived anymore. The same could be said about the lack of stability of the institutional programs. The pre-established behavioral rules, the model of the passive students, and teachers’ work change with the arrival of contradictory values in school, heterogeneity of principles, and the degradation of the idea of societal unity. Thus, as affirmed by Perrenoud (2001), there is the need to build a *negotiated authority* in the classroom to establish a closer human relationship.

We start from the assumption that the didactics of every teacher in the classroom encompasses the many aspects of the pedagogical practice, since the selection of teaching strategies until the human relations established. The aspects connected to the heterogeneity of the classes, to the multiculturalism, to the commitment with the social inclusion are also didactic dimension, renamed ‘fundamental didactic’ (Candau, 2012).

The didactic dimension that best characterize the actions of “good teachers” is the *relational dimension*, the way teachers are involved with the students in class management. The recognition that teachers’ work is a *work of human interactions* (Tardif & Lessard, 2005) or, as stated by Dubet (2002), a *work on the other*. This was what differed the actions of the observed “good teachers” when compared with the others. During the observations it was possible to identify that the relational dimension of teachers’ action was experienced in a much closer dialogue with the methodological strategies used.

Faced by these findings, what do “good teachers” do that is different from the others? Three sets of factors stand out associated to the didactic actions of the “good teachers”: *interaction, how teachers call students, and building of rules in the classroom daily life*.

These teachers call the student by their names and win them over by recognizing them as unique people, by looking at them, by a touch on the shoulder, or by a welcoming smile. By doing that, they help build the self-esteem of these young people from the peripheric regions, often marginalized by their condition. The ways teachers call the students are based on respect, not by the imposition of the profession, but by captivating them.

It was possible to see that these teachers can establish their authority not by the excess of rules or through the grades assigned, but by their involvement with the students. Thus, classroom management is consolidated not as an imposition but as a partnership. The “good teachers” observed and interviewed could keep students involved for longer and interested in the proposed activities even if, sometimes, such activities were restricted to traditional teaching practices. Consequently, the disciplinary control is not a problem that directly interferes in the teaching action.

The result of these interaction seems to possible thanks to teachers’ “relational competence”, which for Barrère (2002) is a set of abilities developed by teachers throughout the years which allow them to survive and, especially, turn the educational work into something useful in work contexts marked by students’ heterogeneity and the lack of legitimacy in the principle of teachers’ authority in the classroom. We could identify that the youngsters, in their interactions with the teachers, feel predisposed to learn, even if the technical resources are simple. When they see themselves involved by these teachers, the students intrinsically legitimize them as the ones boosting learning, regardless of the subject taught or the variety of didactic strategies used.

## b) The motivational role of high school teachers

In the analysis of the teachers’ actions and in the students’ indications, a set of factors was clearly associated to the importance of teachers’ motivational role for high schoolers’ learning. The motivational dimension allows us to understand the association that students and the “good teachers” establish with the lack of meaning of school and the role of teachers to recover it, giving meaning to learning.

In the practice of the teachers indicated as “those who make a difference”, it was possible to notice the recognition of the mismatch between the objectives of school and those

of young people, marked by the diversity of cultural logics in action, justifying the lack of interest and the low performance. These teachers can overcome the excess of students' blaming and believe that interest must be earned, strengthening the motivational dimension of teaching.

Being a motivational teacher seem to require a series of personal and professional characteristics, such as a high level of effort, professional satisfaction, high expectations towards the teaching-learning process, reflective practice, and social-political commitment with teaching. In the classroom practice, these teachers used a series of motivational/mobilizing resources that seem to incentivize students to learn.

For instance, we can see that the role of motivation is implemented by a proactive teacher behavior, which stand out on their actions and on classroom management. One of the mobilizing instruments triggered by some teachers refer to the *language* variations. The teachers that express themselves clearly and use words from students' cultural universe receive students' immediate attention. The informality of language favors the approximation of students with some concepts and, consequently, knowledge.

To the teachers, a good communication with the students is commonly a reason of professional satisfaction increasingly distant from learning considerations. And if they fear so much the exercise of authority, it is also because, as a rule, this threatens the communication with teenagers (Barrère & Martucelli, 2001, p. 270).

Associated with language, we highlight the ability of “good teachers” to use creativity and explore *funny situations* to insert vigor to the class. The students like and are enthusiastic with this stimulus. We observed that these teachers can use relaxed moments as tools to keep students' attention. The jokes/games are also used as ways to criticize inadequate behaviors with no need to resort to long talks or “punishments”.

The *methodological choices* also show teachers' mobilizing potential. Four of the “good teachers” use pedagogical strategies considered by the students as motivating, varying from group works, storytelling, commented exercises, text adaptation, exercises that consider students' context, guided visits to the library, small competitions among the students. In these classes, another difference was that teachers granted more time students' participation and valued individual production.

Another mobilizing behavior developed by the “good teachers” refer to their *degree of commitment* with the teaching process. They are teachers who make an effort, using multiple strategies to learn, search new examples, clarify new terms. He/she insists that all students learn, is concerned with students that do not have a good performance, and aim to understand the difficulties of each one based on their mistakes. He/she walks around the classroom following the process in an almost individual way, supervises, and is attentive to the demands of help. They are teachers in a constant and deliberative process to search for new strategies and ways to better develop the students. It is on the small actions of the teachers that we can identify this logic of commitment towards the learning of all, such as waiting for students to be ready to start the class, create strategies to overcome students’ lateness, give tips to favor learning, attend individually, listen attentively, adequate the time to the needs, care for the absent students.

The excerpt of Lelis’s (2012) article on the complexity of mass school contributes to the understanding of a “new teacher”:

It is a professional that does not exclusively hold the information anymore. The class management, through a pedagogical authority, presents itself as a key task, as the students are not the same anymore and have new sociocultural characteristics – as subjects of rights. More than being a good teacher, the teacher today has to build his/her own legitimacy, motivating the student at any cost, controlling the dispersion of the class, as the mobilization to study is not assured anymore, regardless of teachers’ quality of work (Lelis, 2012, pp. 159-160).

On the other hand, one cannot rely on a simple list of actions or “ready-made prescriptions” associating to them good results, as if it were a process of cause-effect. There are no simple answers to complex questions. But the analysis of “good teachers” actions allowed us to identify these two axes, the *relational dimension for didactic* and the *teachers’ motivational role* that directly contributed to teachers’ actions faced by the complexity of teaching.

If we consider the definition of professionalism adopted by Ludke and Boing (2010), this can be understood as a set of characteristics of a profession that articulates the rationalization of knowledge and the abilities needed for profession

al work. It is what was acquired by people as experience and knowledge, and its capability to use them in a given situation, their way to fulfill the tasks. Unstable, always under construction, emerging from the work action and adapting to a moving context.

From this concept, we could see that the relational and motivational dimensions stand out in the teaching actions to “teach those who do not want to learn”, helping to provide elements that guide the building of a new professionalism of teachers who work in mass schools and, mainly, develop themselves professionally within a crisis reality in which the concept of educational “quality” is debated.

Therefore, we concluded that two characteristics define well this new professionalism: the teacher as a builder of senses (Canário, 2006) and a professional of relationships, as s/he works on the other (Dubet, 2002).

## **“What is the place of didactics in this debate? All and none!**

To reflect on the place of didactics on teachers’ practice, we start from a series of questions: Can we consider the relational and motivational dimensions of teaching as one of the elements of didactics? Is it possible to think a formation of high schoolers, the final phase of K-12 education, that privileges the relational dimension? Can the teacher assume the role of a builder of meanings at school? Would the school be leaving behind the transmission of knowledge and the pedagogical strategies, over the relational dimension of teaching? How can the training of new teachers from different areas incorporate the relational dimension in their curricula?

Without a doubt, mass school brings new dimensions to the practice, mainly the issue of diversity and the complexity of teaching. Depending on the scope of the concept of didactics used, we could state that the series of teachers’ actions on “teaching students who do not want to learn” are part of the didactic field.

The questionnaires showed that 70% of the teachers (N=50) point out some gap on their training processes, mainly in two sets of specific knowledge: one regarding teacher-student relationship, especially youth characteristics, and the other regarding the didactic-pedagogical knowledge on curricular integration and the didactic transposition of scientific knowledge.

From the reality observed in the high school, we could notice a *didactic denial* of teachers. The interviewed teachers reported that their academic training has contributed little

to building their new professionalty and identified that the main gaps in their formative processes were connected to the relational and motivational dimensions. According to these teachers, the formation models offered are inadequate to the reality and to teachers' needs in this context.

It was evident the criticism towards the lack of articulation between theory and practice regarding the knowledge acquired at the university. There are different concepts on how these “good teachers” teach, according to the logic of their pre-service training, regarding the effective value/contribution of the pedagogical knowledge in their teaching practice.

Didactic is something you have to adapt, the undergraduate didactic [course] doesn't prepare you for anything. I lived that, compared to my experience with my students, I developed didactics without having a didactics class, because I started teaching while I was still at my undergrad. So, I noticed with the students which techniques worked, and which didn't. And, after, my didactic classes at the university didn't teach me how to deal with the class. (High school Portuguese teacher)

However, differently from this idea of didactic as strictly technical that seems to still characterize teachers' concepts, the teaching of didactic today tries to move away from an instrumental perspective that has dominated it for many decades and led to its denial among many teachers when faced by the new challenges of school. Candau, since 1983, states that didactic should, beyond the technical dimension (selection of content and strategies, definition of objects), integrate the human dimension (interpersonal relations) as well as political and social ones (social and cultural context) calling it *fundamental didactics*. In this direction, Candau (1983; 2012) defends the need to consolidate types of knowledge capable of really contributing to teachers' work and that, therefore, should integrate the current formative models. The author (2012) affirms the need to start from students' contextual reality, value multiculturalism, and establish new teacher-student relationship beyond a hierarchical one. The challenge for teachers' actions in public school attending underprivileged groups is to guarantee social inclusion through the access to knowledge, from the real conditions in which education is developed.

Nonetheless, we can suppose by the testimonies of the “good teachers” interviewed that little has changed in the reflection of didactic to help form new teachers. The perspective of a technical didactic, preconceived, and distant of the reality, seems to dominate. After more than 30 years since this debate on the reinvention of didactic has been circulating in the

academic circles, little has actually reached the schools and the teachers. The teachers appointed by the students as “good teachers” say that they do nothing different in the class, that they follow the “traditional didactic” or that “didactic” has contributed little to their practice, when, in fact, the relational and motivational dimensions are part of Candau (2012) calls a ‘new didactic’. These teachers, though ignoring it, have developed multiple teaching strategies with the concept of fundamental didactic, based on the interaction with students, the motivation to learn, and the understanding of other culture. According to (2012, p. 16), the “didactic reflection has to be elaborated from the analysis of concrete experiences, trying to continually work the relation theory-practice”.

If we consider the proposal of a new didactic, with multidimensional characteristics, we will have a didactic that aims to deal with the challenges of school education, beyond the technical didactics or a simply humanist one.

Faced by the universalization of schooling and the arrival of underprivileged groups in the school, we see the consolidation of a movement for a new didactic, with an intercultural perspective, focused on diversity and difference (Candau, 2008; 2012; Moreira, 2001; 2008), to approach it to the reality of teachers’ work in the schools, contributing to their pre-service training and their professionalization process<sup>5</sup>. As stated by Candau (2016), “the school centered on homogeneity needs to become a schooling education centered on the difference”. The author recognizes that until today the pre-service training, even with the studies and research in the area, do not answer the concerns and challenges which teachers face in their daily lives: “we need to question the school format and didactic itself”.

If the dimensions of teachers’ work widen by the demands of its object – the learning of underprivileged young people –, there is also the need to widen the dimensions of didactic, as the act of “knowing how to teach”, that characterizes the good teacher, has multiple meanings and ways to take place within the complexity of today’s school. “Knowing how to teach” is much more than simply “give the content”. Today, more than ever, didact needs to

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<sup>5</sup> We use the term teacher professionalization aiming to overcome the discourse that places teaching as a vocation or a simple job, giving it the *status* of profession. It is a way to increase teachers’ prestige, value their work in the public opinion, and guarantee better work conditions, mainly salaries. Three aspects characterize this process: the definition of specific knowledge for teachers’ work, establishing a recognized professional corporation, together with the consolidation of a professional ethics code, and professional autonomy (Tardif, 2013).

connect the different areas of knowledge on human development, as well as the understanding of the social subjects, to find strategic and systematic ways to favor learning.

Didactic is developed according to the historical context it takes place. However, even if the social role of school and the concepts of quality in education are changed, there is a consensus on the struggle in favor of the legitimacy of didactic-pedagogical knowledge as a field that contributes to the teaching practice and as a curriculum content in teachers' training (Candau & Koff, 2015). Finally, we can question if the knowledge produced by the research on the didactic field and often incorporated to teachers' training are in fact contributing to the teachers' practice withing the reality of mass school.

Studies (Candau, 2000; André 2008; André & Cruz, 2012) show a lack of the student figure and the daily school routine in didactic research. However, youth needs to "enter" in the school and their invisibility on school hierarchy overcame. Similarly, the alternatives found by teachers need to be investigated in order to identify the new meanings given to school by its actors. To interpret students' and teachers' perceptions of what is a "good class", or a "good teacher" can contribute to legitimize a more effective and formative school.

## **To conclude: how does one learn to be a teacher in school today?**

The use of the concept "new didactic" articulated with a new concept of teacher (new professionalism) in the curricula of teacher training can by an important guiding element, but not a defining one. We can argue that one can only learn to be a teacher by being a teacher, however it does not deny the importance of training in the development of these professionals.

Teacher training is going through a moment of great questioning by society. The association of the gaps of teacher training and the divergences on the didactic dimension with the low quality of school education places teachers' work and training in the center of the debate.

Concerns with a better qualification of teacher training and their professional conditions are recurrent. However, today, these concerns grow faced by the acute scenario of sociocultural inequalities we live and the challenges that they near future pose (Gatti, 2016, p. 163).

It is impossible to imagine any change that does not pass through teacher training. I am not talking about one more “teaching program” together with all the others released every day. I am talking about the need of another conception, that places teachers’ personal and professional development throughout the different cycles of their lives. We need to build training types of logic that value their experience as students, as student-teacher, as trainees, as a beginner teacher, as a full teacher, and even as a retired teacher (Nóvoa, 2014, p. 32).

We can say there is a tendency to point out the inadequacy of teachers in their teaching roles justified directly by problems in their training. Debates on professional competence, types of knowledge needed to teach, and teachers’ performance aim to identify parameters, be it in the teacher training process or in the greater appreciation of teaching, through a debate on teachers’ professionalization.

Today the perspectives on teacher training have a prominent place in several areas: the academic research, the educational policies, the school, the media, and even the economic field. Souza and Sarti (2014) identified the growth of a “market of teacher training” based on the expansion of pre- and in-service teacher training offered by the private system and the use of educational “packages” of big companies by the public systems, such as the *sistemas apostilados de ensino*<sup>6</sup>. According to the authors, the investment in this “market of teacher training” is the hope of many to solve chronic problems of Brazilian school regarding the quality of the educational services offered, both in public and private schools.

Contrary to the debate brought here, there is a growing movement to re-value technical didactics, using *sistemas apostilados de ensino*, and a curricular reorientation to attend the market logic (Louzano, 2010; Magalhães et al., 2010). The justification in favor of those teaching strategies is mainly supported in the thesis of “education crisis” associated to the logic of teachers’ “incompetence” to deal with mass schooling, due to gaps in their training, as identified by the studies of Souza and Sarti (2014), Adrião et al. (2009), Oliveira (2009), and Cunha (2011).

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<sup>6</sup> Standardized material produced to be used in teaching contexts, with previously established volume of curricular content compiled and organized in texts, explanations, and exercises, distributes in blocks according to the classes. Those booklets became popular as didactic tools targeting the preparation of candidates in selective processes (available at <https://gestrado.net.br/verbetes/sistema-apostilado-de-ensino/>)

The multicultural and plural school, as mass school presents itself, cannot support the homogeneity of educational ‘packages’. A reconfiguration of teacher training must go through teachers’ protagonism, who needs to leave their “dead place” (Sarti, 2012, p. 329) in this dispute for the formative pathways to be actually heard.

We conclude by defending the need to emphasize a “new didactic” in the pre- and in-service teacher training, which can really contribute to teachers’ practice. We argue that a “new didactic” provides the knowledge to develop a new professionalism, as it allows teachers to have a constant reflection on their practice and alternatives to “act under urgency and to teach under uncertainty” (Perrenoud, 2001), in a conscious and non-improvised way; it can be a translator between the theoretical assumptions and the educational practice; it contributes to a set of specific teaching knowledges, guaranteeing the building of a *teaching professionalism* (Tardif, 2013).

There are no ready answers on “how to teach students who do not want to learn”, nor in didacts nor in any field of knowledge. The relational and motivational dimensions need to be a part of this new professionalism to be developed in the new and already-established teachers. However, to do so, these dimensions need to gain more space in the content of the teacher training curricula.

We can see that didactic teaching in pre-service teacher training courses have been losing the prescriptive characteristics of instrumental didactic, however a new way has yet not been found (Andre & Cruz, 2012). Listening to teachers and students seem to be a viable strategy. Educational problems have to be thought in the learning perspective, not in the teaching ones. The work to teach “students who do not want to learn” is not an impossible mission. A way is presented through the findings that show that the teacher makes a difference, as well as the didactic and teacher training. As stated by Roldão (2007), “the professional teacher is the one who teaches not because she/he knows, but because she/he knows how to teach”.

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