

Teachers' work as a form of intellectual activity in conditions of their proletarianisation

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Abstract

In this article I examine the inherent characteristics of teachers' work, as a form of intellectual activity, in relation to the changes that this work is undergoing under the neoliberal mode of capitalist accumulation, that can be identified as teachers' "proletarianisation".

I emphasize that the work of teachers, as a creative and essentially innovative intellectual activity, is about results that can be appropriated through peoples' consciousness and cannot be quantitatively measured or evaluated by using some standard, time-performance criteria.

In the article it is underlined that teachers' work, as a form of intellectual activity, is not limited to conventional labour time, draws resources (information, knowledge, creative ideas) from all moments of social life and, therefore, extends to all moments in the life of its bearers. In connection with that it involves the activation of the teachers' entire personality and consequently the success of this work largely depends on the overall development of teachers' personalities.

I also reflect on some specific structural aspects of teachers' work, such as a) the knowledge transmission, b) the development of the students' cognitive-cultural abilities and c) the cultivation of learning interest and social attitudes.

By examining the phenomenon of teachers' "proletarianisation" and "alienation", I focus on the essential contradiction between teachers' work and the dominant law of capital accumulation as well as the neoliberal policies imposed on education.

At the end I distinguish some crucial fields of teachers' struggle against proletarianisation and alienation.

Keywords: *teachers' work, teaching, education, capitalism, proletarianisation*

Teachers' work as intellectual activity

In the global economy, learning and education acquire particular social significance, due to the fact that scientific knowledge increasingly becomes a productive force that decisively influences the development of technology and production, as well as almost all areas of social life. In connection to that, highly-skilled intellectual labour becomes the most important factor of economic innovation, competitiveness and profitability. Therefore, education is viewed as the principal sphere for the formation of crucial labour skills and as a primary driver of economic success (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007, p. 14). We could say that education, along with science, is converted into an integral part of the system of material production.

At the same time and for the above reason, educational institutions are undergoing significant changes in order to become flexible enough to meet the needs of the capitalist economy (Hill & Kumar, 2009; Foster, 2011). Not by accident does the neoliberal agenda implemented worldwide seek to subordinate education to labour market requirements, thus reducing the educational process to the formulation of specific skills in order to "support qualities of flexibility and adaptability in the workforce" (Hirtt, 2013, p. 123).

This aim together with the reform of education as a public sector sphere, opening it up to market forces for profitable investment, requires the decisive breakdown of the resistance from teacher unions and all other social institutions who support education as a public good (Robertson, 2008, p. 12).

International organizations play a decisive role in this process, since they act as a collective capitalist state that imposes elaborate educational reforms on the various countries. Institutions such as OECD and the World Bank, along with global education consulting firms and corporate philanthropic foundations, are very active in promoting the radical transformation of the professional status and working conditions of educators (Robertson, 2012).

The close connection between education and the system of material production implemented through neoliberal policies dramatically influences the work of teachers and their position in educational institutions. Given the importance of teachers' work for the education of students, it is necessary to examine what the distinguishing characteristics of this work are and what impact the neoliberal policies have on it.

An interesting reflection on the specificity of teachers' work as a form of intellectual activity is given by Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux. They suggest that viewing teachers as intellectuals “provides a theoretical basis for examining teacher work as a form of intellectual labor”, “clarifies the ideological and material conditions necessary for intellectual work” and “helps to illuminate the various modes of intelligibility, ideologies, and interests that are produced and legitimated by teacher work” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 30).

Aronowitz and Giroux point (1985) out that viewing teachers as intellectuals provides arguments for a critique of ideologies that legitimate separating the conceptualization, planning and designing of teaching activities from the processes of implementation and execution. They claim that teachers must reflect upon what they teach and how they teach it and also play an active role in shaping the purposes and conditions of schooling.

Furthermore, they state that viewing teachers as intellectuals “provides the theoretical groundwork for interrogating the specific ideological and economic conditions under which intellectuals as a social group need to work in order to function as critical, thinking, creative human beings” (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985, p. 31). Based on the above-mentioned ideas, they distinguish between four categories of intellectuals (as well as four categories of educators as intellectuals): a) the transformative intellectuals, b) the critical intellectuals, c) the accommodating intellectuals and d) the hegemonic intellectuals.

It should be underlined that the attention given by Aronowitz and Giroux to the definition of teachers as intellectuals has been a very fruitful contribution to the understanding of the specificity of educational work and to the critical examination of the conditions under which it takes place.

Of course the suggested four categories of teachers constitute ideal types and as such are quite schematic. These types are not clearly derived from a specific study of social/class relations and antagonisms, within which the various forms of consciousness and the corresponding groups of intellectuals are shaped, but are formed through an abstract a-priori selection of the features that are supposed to be specific to each type. It is quite evident that, apart from the reference to Gramsci, the analysis of Aronowitz and Giroux contains no study of the class antagonisms that shape the main opposing groups of intellectuals.

Considering teachers as intellectuals and examining closer their work we should underline that this work is not directly productive or it is not productive in the usual meaning of the word “production”. Teaching constitutes a form of intellectual labour (much like any scientific and artistic activity), which differs significantly from labour that directly transforms nature producing use values and value. In fact, the work of teachers does not produce anything, but it however significantly contributes to the formation and development of personality.

Having said that, we consider the claim of David Harvie that teachers are productive labourers and producers of the commodity “labour power”, and that their labour directly produces value and surplus value as being simplistic (Harvie, 2006, p. 2, p. 4). By supporting this view, Harvie highlighted the tendency of teaching labour to take the form of alienated and abstract labour, and become commensurable (Harvie, 2006, pp. 9-17).

We can comment that Harvie’s statement mostly focuses on certain neoliberal policy aspects towards teacher’s labour and avoids any study of the specificity of such labour per se. Concerning Harvie’s idea that the work of teachers produces the commodity “labour power”, we must underline that as for the cognitive-cultural content of “labour power” (a specific variety of human cultural-intellectual abilities), this is an integral part of personality, and a personality is essentially not “produced”, but it is formed as a result of intellectual as well as emotional appropriation of culture.

This process is significantly aided by teachers and education but not produced by them, granted that in the educational process, students are never passive objects shaped through a supposedly “productive” activity of the teachers. The

totality of teaching effects that the students receive from teachers is refracted through their consciousness and affects them only as a result of their active reaction and work on them. That is why students' education is eventually also a process of self-education. The extent to which and the way in which these effects influence the formation of the students' personality is never something self-evident and given. For this reason, the results of teaching work by nature are never precisely predictable.

We can claim that teachers' work is an intellectual - cultural activity that impacts and shapes the personality not only of students but of teachers as well. As a process, it is not an interaction between subjects and objects, but a pedagogical relationship in which teachers and students all participate as subjects. The result of teaching activity is never simply the creation of labour power, but is rather something more: the general formation and development of students' personality (their emotional and cognitive abilities, moral virtues, aesthetic and philosophic views, ideologies, social ideals and attitudes etc.). As for the commodity "labour power" that is created in the educational process this can be considered just as that part of workers' personality that can be commodified in labour market.

Here it should be clarified, that although the work of teachers is not directly productive, it nevertheless indirectly participates in material production as an activity that crucially supports the formation and development of wage workers' skills. Consequently teachers are involved in material production not as immediate producers but as part of the collective labourer (Reid, 2003), as bearers of the necessary educational activities of society's collective labour. In relation to the above, it should be pointed out that teachers' work cannot be reduced to abstract labour, i.e. simply to the expenditure of physical labour power or physical energy. Teachers' labour, as well as scientific and artistic

labour (and any form of creative intellectual labour compared to predominantly physical labour) does not correspond to the expenditure of physical power. The results or “productivity” of this labour are not determined by an increase or decrease in the expenditure of physical power which constitutes abstract labour, nor can they be measured on the basis of this expenditure in the unit of time. If teachers’ work is interwoven with a multitude of inspirations, spontaneous conclusions, creative discoveries and inventions, it is inconceivable to try to measure it as something homogeneous. Teaching work, as a creative and essentially innovative intellectual activity, cannot be quantitatively measured or evaluated by using some standard, time-performance criteria. Creativity as a fundamental element of teachers’ work is an incommensurable dimension (although there may be arbitrary policies that impose its commensurability). Generally speaking, it is an illusion to believe that the educational process, the functioning of schools and the performance of students are technical issues subject to precise measurement and commensurability; such a view would disregard the complex variety of social, class, economic and cultural factors that determine these issues (Angus, 1993).

In the case of teachers, an increased workload and attempted work intensification can by no means lead to increased “productivity”.¹ If teachers’ creativity is essentially linked to their ability to innovate, then we should take into account the following statement from a UNESCO paper, which explains that

innovation cannot be arranged by fiat. It is precisely because innovation has become largely unforeseeable that it is important to concentrate on the conditions that favour the emergence of the process of innovation: for they constitute the only factor that it is in our power to affect. (UNESCO, 2005, p. 59)

A significant aspect of teachers' work, as a form of intellectual activity, lies in the fact that it involves the activation of the teachers' entire personality, their knowledge and cognitive abilities, as well as their emotions, aesthetic-artistic skills, moral principles, philosophical worldviews etc. Therefore, the success of their work largely depends on the overall development of their personalities.

It is worth pointing out that intellectual activity, as carried out in the field of education, as well as science and art, is not limited to conventional labour time; it draws resources (information, knowledge, creative ideas) from all moments of social life and, therefore, extends to all moments in the life of its bearers.

Subsequently, teachers do not only work when they are at school or preparing lessons for school, but also during their leisure time, when they enrich their personality with skills, knowledge, and ideas, to be used in the process of teaching. In essence, teaching work transcends the strict distinction between necessary labour time and leisure. Therefore, in order for the work of teachers to be effective, all conditions of their professional and social life should be favourable for their development as personalities.

Consequently, the authentic motivation for carrying out such a work cannot be external to it, or irrelevant to the teachers' creative needs as personalities and to their own satisfaction with the content of their activity on a moral, emotional and intellectual level. In other words, as with every creative activity, teaching can only be successfully carried out as a form of self-actualisation of its subjects.

The importance of teachers' intrinsic motivation in teaching is impossible to underestimate, if we take into account that such motivation has a positive impact on the teaching strategies and job satisfaction of teachers. Students taught by an intrinsically motivated teacher enjoy their tasks more and are more

interested in learning than those taught by extrinsically motivated teachers; finally, intrinsic motivation constitutes an important part of accessing teacher studies, staying on the job, and being committed to the profession (Malmberg, 2006).

In the case of teachers' work, as in all activities where creative self-actualisation is required, not only does external motivation or external coercion not contribute to increasing the activities' effectiveness, but it can significantly undermine it. That is why we cannot agree more with the statement that "Human creativity cannot be administered or rushed" (UN DESA, 2005, p. 36).

On the structural aspects of teachers' work

In order to better understand teachers' work it is worth moving now to the examination of some of its more specific structural aspects. In teachers' work we could distinguish three main aspects: a) the knowledge transmission, b) the development of the students' cognitive-cultural abilities and c) the cultivation of learning interest and social attitudes.

To begin with the first aspect, teaching is socially necessary because it transmits crucial knowledge that has been accumulated through the historical development of humankind. The importance of teaching as knowledge transmission is connected with the fact that it leads students into cognitive fields (scientific theories, philosophical ideas, artistic traditions and techniques) that lie beyond their immediate everyday experience, and beyond what the students themselves would be able to discover without instruction.

Teaching would not have any special importance if it was used just to recycle the empirical consciousness of students. Teaching has to acquaint students with

aspects, processes and laws of material reality that cannot be perceived via individual sensual experience. Moving beyond everyday empirical knowledge, teaching helps students reach the most advanced scientific and cultural achievements of humankind. Thus, it gives them the ability to see the world through the eyes of humanity and not only through their personal eyes.

That is why the transmission of knowledge that lies beyond lived experience is inherently connected with the development of the general intellectual-cognitive and cultural abilities of students, and in particular with the ability of reflective-conceptual thinking.

Through teaching, educators organize and develop the intellectual-cognitive activities of students (from the more simple to the most complex) – this is the second aspect of teachers' work. Through these activities students become able to assimilate the taught material, and ascend from spontaneous, vague, empirical notions to more elaborate, systematic, scientific concepts and categories (Vygotsky, 1986). In other words, educators build the zones of proximal development of their students, as Vygotsky (1986) claims, i.e. the students' capacity and perspectives of autonomous cognitive activity and development.

Building the zones of students' proximal development requires teachers to have reflective skills, to be able to understand and make use of the epistemological and sociological dimensions of knowledge and curricula, but also to create an environment of active thinking for students, while they teach. Only actively, originally and critically thinking teachers can teach thinking. Only through the purposeful introduction of students into created situations of active, original, critical thinking can their cognitive abilities be developed.

In this respect, the necessity and ultimate importance of teaching consists in its ability to purposefully lead the development of students instead of following it as a spontaneous natural process (Vygotsky, 1986).

It is worth underlining here that, contrary to the idea of the Rousseauian - Montessorian pedagogical tradition, concerning an inner wealth of abilities that is supposed to exist in a child's nature from the very beginning, it is actually organised systematic teaching and the crucial role of teachers that pave the way for the formation and development of the most advanced abilities in children. At the same time, teaching presupposes a complex pedagogical relationship between teachers and students. Through this relationship, teachers contribute decisively to the formation of the students' overall attitude towards knowledge and learning, i.e. their learning interest, as well as the broader formation of the students' social attitudes – this is the third aspect of teachers' work.

As a pedagogical relationship, teaching involves a mutual interaction between personalities, which is not only cognitive but also emotional. Teachers experience an array of emotions in the classroom. Their work involves a daily, intensive and extensive emotional activity, which enables them to cope with the challenges of teaching (Flores & Day, 2006). Emotions are crucial in creating an effective classroom climate (Hargreaves, 2003).

Teaching causes emotions, possibly on a wider scale than thoughts. It conveys and affects moods, provokes aesthetic judgments. Consequently, teaching has an important aesthetic dimension, and although teachers cannot be viewed as artists, teaching includes an element of performance which creates an aesthetic experience for students (Conklin, 1970). As a performance, the act of teaching goes through a process of emotional escalation with an initial “sense of

expectancy”, then a sense of culmination (a “growing élan”) and finally a sense of “tired satisfaction” (Barone, 1983). The whole process resembles the Aristotelian aesthetic catharsis.

This aesthetic aspect of teaching has a significant educational impact on students. Through emotional impressions and aesthetic judgments, it conveys the teachers' personal stances to the students. According to Conklin (1970)

the teacher's attitudes toward the subject matter, toward teaching, and toward life in general are taught concomitantly. The teacher is a value exemplar with whom students identify, and thus the aesthetics of knowing, teaching, and learning has a more general, long-range impact upon the student than the aesthetics of subject matter. (p. 32)

Teaching as a pedagogical relationship is defined by its moral character. It presupposes a special commitment by the teachers to their students and a strong sense of responsibility for their work. We can understand this moral aspect of pedagogical relationship as an authentic dialogue, having in mind Paulo Freire's words that such a dialogue presupposes a “profound love for the world and for people”, a sense of humility and “an intense faith in humankind [...] in their vocation to be more fully human” (Freire, 2005a, pp. 89-90). Founded on love, humility, and faith, dialogue can become a horizontal relationship characterized by mutual trust between the dialoguers (Freire, 2005a, p. 91). In another work of his, Freire defines the main virtues of progressive teachers as being: humility, lovingness “not only toward the students but also toward the very process of teaching”, courage “to fight and to love”, tolerance, as well as decisiveness, security, the tension between patience and impatience, and joy of living (Freire, 2005b, p. 71, pp. 74-76, p. 78).

According to Sahlberg, “Teaching is a profession that is typically driven by ethical motive or intrinsic desire” (Sahlberg, 2010, p. 49). Actually, as many studies show, altruistic reasons are the dominant motivation for teachers when choosing their profession (Claeys, 2011; Watt et al., 2012; Fokkens-Bruinsma & Canrinus, 2014). These altruistic or humanistic reasons include the wish to work in contact with children, the desire to help students succeed and the consideration of teaching as a socially valuable profession (Móller et al. 2009, p. 579, p. 584).

We can conclude that teachers contribute with their whole personality (their ideologies, social ideals, moral virtues and attitudes) to the formation of students’ consciousness and personality, and especially to the cultivation of their life’s ideals and social attitudes. And this is very crucial for the learning process, if we take into account that people do not learn simply because they have mental abilities, but because they find meaning in this activity, which is derived from their ideologies, ideals and social attitudes. It is these ideologies, ideals and social attitudes, as a conscious expression of one’s personal and social needs, which shape peoples’ interest in acquiring knowledge and understanding the world. As Anna Stetsenko (2010) comments

From the transformative stance, knowledge cannot be seen as existing separately from beliefs and ideologies; on the contrary, it is only in light of one’s beliefs, commitments and ideologies (all ingredients or dimensions of one’s identity) that meaningful understanding and learning are possible. (p. 14)

Stetsenko rejects, as naive and politically engaged, the pedagogical position that teachers should merely deliver “facts” and leave their personal beliefs behind classroom doors. As she points out, all human endeavours, including putatively pure ‘intellectual inquiries’, “are never just intellectual but instead, represent

profoundly and inescapably ideological pursuits” (Stetsenko, 2010, p. 14). Consequently, teachers as human beings cannot but act “from within their life agendas and vision for the future” and “should not try to avoid teaching with beliefs and commitments critically embodied in every act of speaking and knowing” (Stetsenko, 2010, p. 14). However, teachers should obviously not demand that students share their positions, but engage with them in a critical open-ended dialogue concerning different visions, ideals and attitudes (Stetsenko, 2010).

From this point of view, teaching in order to be successful should not only transmit knowledge and develop intellectual capacities but also contribute to the cultivation of such social attitudes in students that can generate the strongest learning interest.

Teachers' proletarianization and alienation

While the improvement of education presupposes the creative work of teachers and that they are subsequently provided with the most favourable labour and life conditions, modern capitalism subdues them to regimes of strict administrative control, competitive evaluation, labour alienation and insecurity, thus largely destabilizing the conditions of their work and their prospects of life (Hill, 2005; Hill, 2007). Educators are treated as inherently insufficient professionals, who, in order to become effective, should be under a regime of permanent control and coercion. Coercion upon teachers and schools is interwoven with accountability policies and can be understood as part of capitalist state reaction to economic crisis (Lipman, 2013).

The dominant neoliberal rhetoric incriminates public education for the rigidity of the labour market and youth unemployment, in an effort to conceal the

inherent causes of unemployment and poverty, as these are moulded by the very nature of capitalist production relations (Jonna & Foster, 2016).

At the same time, it treats teachers as being primarily responsible for low levels of student achievement (Townsend & Bates, 2007), presenting them either as guilty for all problems of education or as heroes who can fix these problems on their own. This approach diverts attention away from all systemic-institutional factors (economic/labour relations, social and cultural conditions, state educational and economic policies) that influence and ultimately determine education, thus placing teachers in a very restricted position.

The key changes to the teachers' social position and work under the neoliberal agenda have been identified through the notion of proletarianization. This notion derives from Harry Braverman's labour process theory. Braverman argued that, in order to increase workers' exploitation, capitalism seeks to strengthen its managerial control over them via labour fragmentation and deskilling. Referring mostly to industrial workers, Braverman distinguished the "middle layers" of the labour force, namely specialized and professional employees including teachers, and argued that although these categories enjoy more privileged market positions, they are also exposed to the insecurity of the labour market and to the capitalist control over the labour process (Braverman, 1974).

The proletarianisation thesis refers to the process of teachers' deprofessionalization, the devaluation of their labour power from skilled to average levels (Harris, 1994). Teachers' deskilling in connection with their diminishing autonomy at work indicates their transformation from "middle class employees" to simple workers (Carter & Stevenson, 2012).

In the context of Braverman's analysis, the changes that teachers' work undergoes have been interpreted under the prism of separating the activity of conception from the activity of execution within the educational process, as well as under the Taylorist fragmentation of this work into its smallest constituent units that can be timed and measured (Reid, 2003).

The main meaning of proletarianisation focuses on the idea that teachers are increasingly losing control of their working conditions. Issues such as "what the purposes of education should be", "what knowledge is worth teaching and how", "what the role of school in society should be", are all discussed and decided without the participation of teachers and their voice being heard. At the same time, there is an increasing tendency for the standardisation of the knowledge to be taught in order to better control it. Under these conditions, the intellectual, critical, reflective abilities of teachers are weakened and degraded.

The overall deterioration of teachers' working conditions is also qualified by the notion of alienation, which is closely related to proletarianisation, and involves the sub-terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and estrangement (Brooks et al. 2008). An interesting finding is that the cost of alienation "extends beyond work life and influence teachers' lives en toto" (Brooks et al. 2008, p. 58). Harvie attempts to interpret teachers' alienation in a traditional Marxist way. He distinguishes teachers' alienation a) from their teaching labour, b) from the product of their labour, c) from their own species-being, d) from their fellow workers (Harvie, 2006, pp. 10-13).

It is worth noting here that, in a society such as the capitalist based on alienated labour, all social relations and institutions, including education, are inevitably permeated by forms of alienation. As is aptly remarked, alienated labour exerts

a mortifying influence on all creative human activities: “the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences that human life could potentially offer seem to have been replaced by alien doubles: Work becomes ‘work,’ learning becomes ‘learning.’ A lifeless double” (Jones, 2011, p. 366).

However, there are researchers who have questioned the above approach, suggesting that teachers are not becoming proletarianised in any way but are actually developing more skills and experiencing greater autonomy than ever before (Reid, 2003).

As for autonomy, it is true that teachers express a sense of having a relatively high degree of autonomy within their classrooms to deal with various issues, from curriculum implementation to student counseling, without any kind of direct supervision (Livingstone & Antonelli, 2012). However, as it has been observed, they also totally lack any organizational decision-making power outside the classroom concerning general education policy decisions (Livingstone & Antonelli, 2012). Unfortunately for teachers, crucial issues that influence their classroom activities such as standardized curricula, student testing, classroom sizes, work intensification and accountability are decided by administrative structures, upon which they have no control.

As for teachers’ skills, despite the phenomena of deskilling, we must acknowledge the fact that teachers exercise a high level of professional and social skills during their complex teaching activities. However, even in the case of not only maintaining but increasing their skills, teachers cannot avoid being subject to various forms of centralized or decentralized control, through which their capacity to work is transformed into a teaching activity (Reid, 2003; Carter & Stevenson, 2012). It should be underlined that the neoliberal agenda of

teachers' accountability derives from the general necessity of the capitalist mode of production to transform workers' labour power into a maximally productive labour process. Increasing control over teachers' work also serves the purpose of extracting the best results from their work at the lowest possible cost, the purpose of work intensification (Carter & Stevenson, 2012).

In capitalist economy, the general law of capital accumulation forces capitalists to see how they can reduce production costs in order to increase profits. In public education, it is the state that takes the responsibility to reduce the cost of schooling, while at the same time fulfilling the educational needs of the economy, by developing the skills of the future labour power (Reid, 2003). One way to achieve this is for the state to try to lower teachers' labour costs, either through deskilling their work or by employing a large number of para-professionals to support a small number of well-paid core teachers. Another way is to force teachers to do more with the same or fewer resources (Smyth, et al., 2000). That is why the intensification of teachers' work is permanently on the agenda of neoliberal policies in education. Needless to say that the state's efforts to reduce teachers' labour costs, as well as public expenditure on education, inevitably involve the intensification of managerial control over teachers.

The intensification of teachers' work can be traced to its growing dependence on externally imposed objectives, class assessments and accountability mechanisms, an increase in duties and the lengthening of the working day. Some general consequences of this intensification include: less time for relaxation, a lack of time for skills development, chronic overload, decreasing control over longer-term planning, dependency on externally produced materials and expertise, and reductions in the quality of service (Hargreaves, 1994).

The intensification of teachers' work, which goes hand in hand with its standardisation, managerial control and accountability, forces teachers to retreat into acts of simple knowledge transmission and to pursue short-term and narrow curriculum goals, rather than risking more complex dialogic teaching and learning experiences. In addition to that, teachers' work intensification undermines their sense of responsibility towards their students, as well as their collaboration with them (Stone-Johnson, 2016).

As we find out, in modern capitalist society teachers' work is permeated by strong contradictions. On the one hand, for effective schooling, trust and cooperation among teachers are considered high in demand. Trust among professionals is a crucial aspect of their team relationships that helps them take risks, learn from different people and share information openly in order to provide "moral support when dealing with new and difficult challenges" (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 109).

On the other hand, the teachers' subjection to accountability procedures and performance competition has a devastating effect on the relationships among them; it "often threatens school and community social capital" and "builds suspicion, low morale, and professional cynicism" (Shalberg, 2010, p. 57). Precarious employment in education leads to what Hargreaves (2003) called the "culture of competitive individualism", when "school competes with school, outbidding its competitor for the best students and families in a Darwinian struggle for survival and success" (p. 167), while teachers stop learning from one another, keeping their best ideas to themselves.

On the one hand, in modern capitalism, knowledge, creativity and invention are considered intrinsic to everything people do (Hargreaves, 2003). Teaching for

the capitalist “knowledge economy” is supposed to foster and thrive on “creativity, flexibility, problem-solving, ingenuity, collective intelligence, professional trust, risk-taking, continuous improvement” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 29).

On the other hand, tough standardization, managerial control, accountability and competition substantially undermine teachers' autonomy and initiative, along with their eagerness to learn and think. As Hargreaves concludes, “teachers are being robbed of the flexibility and creativity that is essential in the knowledge economy” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 82).

Although the neoliberal policies that have substantially destabilized the work and social position of teachers are supposedly aimed at the improvement of student performance, evidence has shown that this has not occurred. Interesting cases in this respect are the US charter schools, where teachers are employed on competitive individual contracts, with no tenure guarantees or union protection. Research on charter schools has demonstrated that student outcomes in them are not always better than in traditional public schools, but in many cases and areas are actually worse (Robertson, 2012; Chapman, 2014; Chapman & Donnor, 2015). Other reports criticize charter schools as being a totally unsuccessful project (NPE, 2017).

Another very interesting case is Finland, a country with high levels of student performance according to PISA rankings, but with no key neoliberal instruments in the teachers' work management. Finland enjoys a successful educational system with no need to subject teachers to tough evaluation and accountability mechanisms and their pay is not tied to student performance (Sahlberg, 2011; Robertson, 2012).

The acknowledgement of the destructive effects of neoliberal policies on teachers' work can be traced in documents published by some very authoritative world organizations. In the *Joint Message on the occasion of World Teachers' Day* by UNESCO, the International Labour Organization, UNDP, UNICEF and Education International it is stated that large numbers of teachers have been driven out of the profession, sometimes after only a few years of service, because of dissatisfaction with loss in status, low salaries, poor teaching and learning conditions, and lack of career progression or adequate professional training and that responses to teachers' shortages by increasing class sizes and teacher workload (by hiring untrained or poorly trained professionals or contract teachers with little job security) can further lower the status of the teaching profession and cause a loss of professional motivation. (UNESCO et al., 2007)

However there is a stubborn persistence in implementing these policies worldwide. As Hargreaves aptly comments

Force, pressure, shame, top-down intervention, markets, competition, standardization, testing, and easier and quicker passages into teaching, closure of failing schools, the firing of ineffective teachers and principals, and fresh starts with young teachers and newly established schools—the very reform strategies that have failed dismally over 2 decades in many Anglo-Saxon nations—are being reinvented and re-imposed with even greater force and determination. (Hargreaves, 2011, p. xv)

Based on the above, we can conclude that the more education constitutes part of the material production system and educators' work becomes significant for capital accumulation, the more it is dealt with in terms of the fundamental -for capitalist economy- law of capital accumulation, which demands a constant reduction of the relevant labour costs and at the same time a constant increase of the teachers' productivity in measurable terms and time frames. Subjecting

educators to the law of capital accumulation inevitably entails their submission to a bureaucratic control regime, to administrative and economic coercion.

The law of capital accumulation consists in the domination of the dead objectified labour over the living, as a means of forcing the living labour to increase its productivity. It is the law which ensures the vitality of the capitalist mode of production, given that it constantly forces wage workers to produce more in a shorter time and with a lower labour cost. This law can be effective as long as it is possible to increase labour productivity through its exploitation and as long as the labour expenditure per time unit can be measured in comparison with its outcomes. However, when the development of the production system is based on the creative intellectual activity of the knowledge workers (educators included), imposing exploitative labour relations and coercion renders negative outcomes: it undermines the knowledge workers' productivity and thus the development of the overall production system.

It was Marx who first demonstrated the inevitable contradiction of the law of capital accumulation:

Capital itself is the moving contradiction, [in] that it presses to reduce labour time to a minimum, while it posits labour time, on the other side, as sole measure and source of wealth [...] On the one side, then, it calls to life all the powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour time employed on it. On the other side, it wants to use labour time as the measuring rod for the giant social forces thereby created, and to confine them within the limits required to maintain the already created value as value. (Marx, 1993, p. 706)

Taking into account that creative intellectual activity is not feasible when it is subjected to regimes of exploitation, antagonism, precarity and bureaucratic

control, it becomes clear that when knowledge and the creative- intellectual abilities of people become society's basic productive force, then the capitalist exploitative relations of production become essentially inappropriate for increasing and improving the workers' effectiveness. For education, this means that the more directly its institutions are dominated by the capitalist mode of production, the more teachers' work will be regulated by the imperatives of capital accumulation law, and the more it will be undermined, deformed and downgraded.

Teachers in the struggle against proletarianisation and alienation

The contradiction between the essential specificity of teachers' work, as a form of intellectual activity, and the capitalist relations of production constitutes the basis for the teachers' struggle against proletarianisation and alienation, in connection with the development of a critical, anti-neoliberal and anti-capitalist consciousness for educators.

Such a struggle primarily concerns the defense of teachers' professional rights, and their resistance to policies leading to precarious employment conditions. At the same time, it concerns the position of teachers in educational institutions, the way these institutions are managed and the relationships they develop with the state and the economy.

The teachers' struggle for control over schools through the establishment and reinforcement of collective forms of self-management is particularly important for the effectiveness of their work per se, given that it is only people with a decisive voice and role concerning the conditions of their work, who are able to develop an authentic sense of responsibility and care for their professional activity. The collective self-management of schools by teachers is a necessary

precondition in order to preserve and strengthen the comradeship and solidarity among them, which is very important because it is only through them that teachers can share ideas and abilities, and better resist the pressures imposed by the state and the market economy.

But let it not escape attention, that the participation of teachers in the collective schools' management implies their engagement with the critical issues of educational policy, the adoption of a political attitude towards the dominant policies applied in education. From this point of view, teachers in schools and for the needs of schools' collective management cannot but consciously function as political subjects.

A significant field of teachers' struggle in education constitutes teaching itself and its related procedures of analysing, interpreting and selecting which knowledge to teach and how. Despite the neoliberal policies of surveillance and control regarding their work, teachers can develop and use many forms of alternative pedagogies, concerning what and how they teach (Webb et al., 2009).

Teaching knowledge in any case presupposes its comprehension, a specific reflective activity by educators. In relation to the need for reflection over the knowledge to be taught, a critical attitude towards the ideological dimensions of knowledge, the dominant ideas, both ideologically elaborated (coming from institutions that specifically produce the dominant ideology), as well as those that arise spontaneously through everyday consciousness (coming from the daily experience of students and society) is extremely important. Crucial is the critical attitude towards ideas that present capitalist society in a way that serves the interests of the ruling class, that is, as an a-historic, natural reality, while at

the same time idealizing its main features, such as private property, antagonism and the survival of the fittest.

Teaching as a critical intellectual activity involves also the questioning of the dominant in education positivist perception of knowledge, which treats knowledge as a set of data that is transferable, absorbable and applicable, as if it were a technical process detached from social needs, class interests and ideologies. Positivism as a philosophical and epistemological tradition on the one hand, expresses the interest of the bourgeois society in knowledge accumulation and use, in order to achieve measurable and profitable outcomes. On the other hand, by refusing to acknowledge and reflect on the social relations and class interests affecting the creation, interpretation and application of knowledge, it epitomises the efforts of the dominant class to avert any possible use of society's cognitive activity against its domination.

Teaching as a critical activity is also associated with the questioning of empiricism, and the phenomenological, fragmented view of reality and curricula. Such critical activity involves a systematic, dialectical examination of society and its relation to nature. It also involves the cultivation of the students' ability to understand the fundamental relations which determine the human condition, and the contradictions which constitute the source of social development and change. This dialectical examination of the dominant social relations also involves a search for a potentially alternative world. Needless to say, that the most crucial aspect of a critical reflection upon the dominant social condition is the detection and exposure of its historical limits and consequently of the possibility to transcend it.

Teachers' struggle against proletarianisation and alienation, neo-liberalism and capitalism, cannot only be limited to education alone but should be extended to

wider social issues and fields. As Kevin Harris noted (1994), teachers with the proper education could develop an informed counter-hegemonic political-epistemological stance and play a vanguard role in rational social reconstruction endeavours.

To put it in another way, the quest for an emancipatory education is directly linked to the quest for another, emancipated society. This mainly presupposes the development of the teachers' social consciousness, regarding their common interests with the other working class strata, and their participation in joint struggles for the emancipation of labour (Murphey, 2008).

This is because it is only through the emancipation of labour from the power of capital that people's education can become a truly empowering and liberating activity i.e. a formation of multifaceted personalities who are able to collectively deal with the crucial issues and challenges of economy and social life. It is only through the general emancipation of labour that the emancipation of teachers' work as a form of intellectual labour can succeed.

Notes

1. It is worth noting that one of the core neoliberal ideas concerning teachers' work is teachers' accountability in order to increase their performance. In the World Bank report *Making Schools Work*, we read that the main reasons for teachers' underperformance are "fixed salary schedules, lifetime job tenure, and flat labour hierarchies" (Bruns et al., 2011, p. 142). The World Bank report suggests destabilizing teachers' work conditions and introducing "contracts without guaranteed tenure and pay-for-performance programs" with "direct links between teachers' performance and their rewards or sanctions" (Bruns et al., 2011, p. 145); it therefore implies that such measures can create the incentives that shall lead to improvements in teachers' performance.

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Teachers' work as a form of intellectual activity in conditions of their proletarianisation

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