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## CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS A SPACE FOR THE DISCIPLINE OF BODIES

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**Abstract:** This work aims to understand how the school tames and disciplines children's bodies, transforming them into subjects. The problem presented aims to understand: how is the docilization of bodies in Early Childhood Education? To respond, a study of the knowledge/power of Foucault's work, *Surveillance and Punish* (2013) was carried out. Authors like Veiga-Neto (2017) and Vasconcelos (2020) helped in the understanding and application of Foucault's theories in Education. It is concluded that the school is an institution of kidnapping that makes use of various techniques of control and training of the children's bodies that shapes and prepares them for subjection, naturalizing discipline as necessary for their smooth functioning of society.

**Keywords:** Early childhood education, discipline, bodies.

## **FOUCAULT AND THE SCHOOL AS AN INSTITUTION OF DISCIPLINE**

Michel Foucault was born on the 15th of October 1926 in the city of Poitiers, in the south of France. Although he belonged to a traditional family of doctors, Foucault was interested in history and philosophy. Contrary to the opinion of the father, but supported by his mother graduated in Philosophy in 1948. He was also interested in Psychology, being graduated in 1950 and in Psychopathology in 1952. He published his first book in 1954, "Mental Illness and Personality". In the following decade, his works took on larger proportions, reverberating outside academic circles when working on the question of knowledge (VASCONCELOS, 2020).

Foucault taught psychology and philosophy at several universities around the world. He wrote for several newspapers, published several works and worked as a psychologist

in psychiatric hospitals and prisons, work that provided him with empirical elements for the constitution of some of his works, such as *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Madness*. He became a celebrated and acclaimed author who traveled the world giving lectures, including in Brazil. The author died in Paris, France, on June 25, 1984, a victim of complications from AIDS.

This work aims to understand how the school tames and disciplines children's bodies, preparing them for an adult life of work and obedience. Thus, the focus of the research is on discipline and punish by Michel Foucault. Originally published in 1975, the book deals with "the understanding of the processes by which individuals become subjects as a result of an intricate process of objectification that takes place within networks of powers, which capture, divide, classify" (VEIGA- NETO, 2017, p. 55).

The school is an important "abduction institution" in the process of formation of modern man that, inside, keeps children under constant surveillance, discipline and endless evaluations that divide and classify them according to what is considered normal within the complex relations of power permeating society.

Although Foucault did not produce a philosophy of education, his study of power relations within society, which formed modern man, investigates the school as one of the institutions whose objective is to train bodies, discipline them and format minds to to be submitted to the norm. His work is rich in detailed historical studies that serve as analytical tools from which it is possible to reflect on Education as a knowledge-power that is made in the relationships that constitute the subject.

It is necessary to understand the philosopher's point of view on questions of power and its relevance in the constitution

of the docile and educated subject, as well as the role of the school in the formation of this subject. Vasconcelos (2020, p. 78, 79), points out that:

power, for Foucault, is not a thing, but a relationship that, in itself, is not necessarily repressive nor simply possession of the State. On the contrary, power is exercised throughout the social body and operates at the micro levels of social relations in an omnipresent way. Foucault understands that the school institution serves to educate the subject not only in relation to knowledge, but also understands the school institution as a disciplinary institution, which gives access to technologies that act on our bodies, disciplining them (...) The school it can be considered a space of surveillance and punishment for the training of bodies.

For Veiga-Neto (2017, p. 15) Foucault's work shows how the relations of power and knowledge have been building over the last four centuries, the modern subject. The school is described by the author as an important institution in the formation of the productive subject and adaptable to the rules of modern society. "It was based on Foucault that one could understand the school as an efficient hinge capable of articulating the powers that circulate there with the knowledge that shapes it and is taught there, whether pedagogical or not". According to Vasconcelos (2020, p. 77):

Foucault analyzes the school as a space in which the policies of disciplining bodies are carried out, and we perceive this disciplining in a natural way. Furthermore, he proposes the relationship of being able to know in a naturalized way, and builds a vision of power that is different from the classical theory of power, which considers power within the general theory of the state.

It is perceived that the school is a "abduction institution", which aims to train the bodies. Such an institution removes the subject from his family and social spaces and confines him for several hours of the day and/or for long

periods of his life, with the objective of shaping and disciplining behavior, formatting their mind and body (VASCONCELOS, 2020). This institution has the function of training and disciplining bodies, making them prepared to perform functions of production and obedience, that is, it teaches the individuals to behave in society in a docile manner, adapting to its demands.

Institutionalized disciplining has become natural and necessary, thus, concomitant with the process of body training, the mind is formatted, which aims to inculcate in the disciplined individual the need to conform to the Standard. The norm compares and classifies individuals into normal and abnormal, making abnormality something undesirable, and those who fit into it are punished, segregated and shamed so that they crave normality and adapt to it by accepting the training and docility of their bodies. Thus, the individual becomes part of the normalized society and receives the benefits of inclusion and acceptance while their specificities are explored in the name of order and the common good.

### **THE SCHOOL AS A SPACE FOR THE DISCIPLINATION OF BODIES**

In Discipline and Punish, Foucault (2013, p, 118), discusses the notion of docility, "which unites the manipulable body to the analyzable body. A body that can be submitted, that can be used, that can be transformed and perfected is docile". Docilization is acquired throughout the individual's life, which is subjective from body control techniques. These techniques limit, prohibit and oblige him, in order to "work him in detail; to exercise over him a coercion without slack; to keep it at the same level as mechanics – movements, gestures, attitude, speed: infinitesimal power over the active body". In the process of docilization,

each movement needs to be effective and be focused on some productive activity and when controlling the process more than the result “it is exercised according to a codification that scrutinizes the time as much as possible, space and movement”. This coercion results in meticulous control of the body that submits its forces and “imposes a relationship of docility-utility” on it, which Foucault called discipline.

Discipline is a precise instrument in the formation of submissive, exercised and docile bodies. Discipline makes the body's forces focus on utility, a capacity that can be increased at the same time that domination/obedience is accentuated (FOUCAULT 2013). An example that can be pointed out is the child who paints a drawing with “whim” and gets a compliment from the teacher, making him want to continue doing the same thing more and better. But, if the child does not do the activity with the expected whim, he will be coerced until he is subject, that is, he becomes docile and submits to the power imposed on him and meets the teacher's demand.

Discipline is in the details, sometimes it seems subtle and even innocent in appearance, but each detail has its importance in the control and standardization of the bodies. “Discipline is a political anatomy of detail” (FOUCAULT, 2013, p. 120). In Early Childhood Education, discipline is part of the daily routine that must be followed meticulously by children, from the way they sit at the desk to the posture in the chair. row.

To be effective, discipline needs to be applied precisely. First, individuals need to be specifically distributed in space so that their capabilities are enhanced and their bodies controlled.

The distribution of the classroom space is carefully designed and the children are distributed so that the teacher knows where to locate each one of them, monitor their behavior, control their attitudes and measure

their qualities. “Procedure, therefore, to know, master and use. Discipline organizes an analytical space” (FOUCAULT, 2013, p. 123). This distribution of students in the classroom gives the teacher the power to control the collective space and the subject individually by collecting information to improve control techniques over children. It is important to point out that this distribution in the school space is also based on age and grade; for learning ability; by behavior; by gender and other individual characteristics that define each child's place within the school.

The disciplining of bodies is done in the details, in the distribution of individuals in space, in surveillance, in the control of movements and also in the control of time. The school has strict schedules from the time the children enter, and distributes the time into: reception time, time to go to the bathroom, time to do activities, time to play, time to talk to classmates, time to have a snack, time to relax and time to go home. The schedules are repeated daily in Kindergarten classes with the aim of speeding up the learning process in an orderly and effective way. Thus, the mechanical body gives way to the manipulated, exercised, productive, docile body.

### **TECHNIQUES FOR CONTROLLING AND DISCIPLINING BODIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

The school makes use of combined techniques to maintain control of the children while inculcating in them the need for training, forming docile subjects who self-discipline. According to Foucault (2013, p. 143):

disciplinary power is, in effect, a power that, instead of appropriating and withdrawing, has the greater function of “training”; or without a doubt to train to withdraw and appropriate even more and better. (...) The success of disciplinary power is undoubtedly due to the use of simple instruments; the hierarchical look, the normalizing sanction

and their combination in a procedure that is specific to it, the exam.

The school is the first institution in which the individual experiences disciplinary power and with the support of the family, society and the State, this institution of knowledge establishes power relations in order to subjectify the naturalization of training in the individual, making it normal, acceptable and binding on all members of society. Within the school, the teacher makes use of disciplinary power by controlling the environment, distributing children in their respective places; choose the activities to be carried out; control the time spent on each task; allow or deny each attitude or request of the students and assign them grades for their behavior, dedication to studies and learning acquired in class.

The power given to the teacher is guaranteed by the other existing power relations in the school and in society, which assure him of authority and control of the class, that is, if the child rebels, he will be disciplined by the teacher with the approval of the family and the other members of the school body leading the child to submit to the forces that operate on him.

According to Vasconcelos (2020, p. 77), for Foucault, “the most fundamental thing in human relationships are power relationships, as they are in all of our relationships. Subjects are produced in power relationships, and it is in relationships of power that we are subjectivated”.

Thus, power relations shape the subject and standardize behaviors, making bodies useful and obedient, but preserving individuality with the aim of exploring its usefulness. “In a certain sense, regulatory power forces homogeneity; but it individualizes, allowing to measure the deviations, determine the levels, fix the specialties and make the differences useful, adjusting them to each other” (FOUCAULT, 2013, p. 154).

Since the child's arrival at school, he is trained to obey orders, respect the rules and submit to adults. This training is exhaustively repeated in the school routine, which aims to make children docile so that they obey the rules, maintain order and discipline in the environment so that the exercise is productive and thus, the child acquires intellectual development and body training, ie Education. Education that prepares the individual for the civilized world and to be a citizen who contributes with his work force for the good functioning of society, who obeys the laws and helps in the maintenance of the instituted powers. He becomes the one with a docile body and a well-formed mind, willing to serve in the power relations of modern society.

Upon entering the school space, children are separated by grade and directed to position themselves in queues - most often separated by gender - to wait for the time/signal to enter their respective classrooms. In class, they are instructed by the teacher to sit at the previously lined up desks. The posture must be erect, knees in line and look towards the teacher who observes everyone from her place at the front of the class.

It is thus verified that the movements performed by the children are observed by the attentive and disciplinary gaze of the teacher. Children are taught to observe and look for the teacher's expression of approval or disapproval, explicit in her gaze. In spaces outside the classroom there is always someone watching, in the hallways, in the bathroom, on the playground or at recess. At all times, the child is monitored by the disciplinary gaze of an Education professional and the security cameras distributed throughout the school corridors. Foucault (2013, p.143), states that “the exercise of discipline presupposes a device that obliges the game of looking; an apparatus where the techniques that allow seeing induce the effect of power, and where, in exchange,

the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible.”

In the first days of class, the teacher is in charge of dictating the rules and “agreements” of the class; she emphasizes the use of the “magic words” and repeats them until everyone has memorized them and/or whenever an infraction occurs. By subjectifying the routine and the rules, the children become vigilant of themselves and of the other children, always being willing to correct or denounce the offending colleague. In the words of Foucault (2013, p. 144):

hierarchical, continuous and functional surveillance (...) is thus organized as a multiple, automatic and anonymous power; for, if it is true that surveillance rests on individuals, its functioning is a network of relationships from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally; this network “sustains” the whole, and permeates it with effects of power that rest on one another: inspectors who are perpetually supervised.

This vigilant look experienced by children at school is naturalized by them and internalized so that in adult life, they become self-vigilant, watch over their companions and in their relationships exercise the power to discipline the other who is subordinate to them, thus reproducing the power relations that characterize modern society.

Concomitant with the watchful eye, there is the normalizing sanction that establishes the power of the Norm, that is, it creates a standard of normality and distinguishes individuals and/or their actions into normal and abnormal, such a classification is made, according to Foucault (2013, p. 152), in the “perpetual penalty that crosses all points and controls all instants of disciplinary institutions compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes. In a word, it normalizes.”

It is possible to observe in the school the

power of the norm institutionalized in the rules and in the disciplinary power exercised by the teacher who compares the work and the behavior of the children differentiating them and classifying them in “good and bad”, however, it also has the objective to make the bad ones into good ones and thus homogenize the group so that they have the same performance and behavior. Those who meet the norm are promoted and violators are punished. Punishments are made through exclusion from activities or games, suspension of classes or failure.

Exclusion is a form of discipline, because when feeling excluded from the group, the individual is encouraged to make an effort to submit to the rules and thus be accepted back into the class of those considered normal - dedicated students, obedient to the rules and willing to submit. Those who fail to submit to the norm are kept segregated or on the margins of the classroom and later of society, such as those who are interned in other kidnapping institutions such as asylums, prisons and/or psychiatric hospitals. These individuals are removed from the middle of society or ignored by it, such as drug addicts, mentally handicapped, abandoned minors and homeless people.

The effect of the hierarchical penalty exercised by the school guarantees that children are prepared to assume their role in the disciplinary society. Thus, it is necessary to make everyone look alike, that is, that they are subject to the same model: “subordination, docility, attention in studies and exercises, and the exact practice of duties and of all parts of life. discipline” (FOUCAULT, 2013, p. 154). To this end, students are distributed according to their aptitudes, skills and behavior and thus prepare them for the job market and consequently their social acceptance.

The effects of the normalizing sanction are reflected, sustained and perpetuated

throughout the subject's life, since in the labor market, in the hospital and even in prisons, it is possible to verify the same model of disciplinary power that is constituted in power relations. Vasconcelos (2020, p. 83), states that "disciplining the body is present in the way of sitting, walking, gesturing, in short, the human body is transformed into a machine. The disciplining of the body takes place through the training of gestures, in order to reach perfection".

The school has the objective of molding and disciplining bodies, transforming children into productive machines that serve the labor market as products to be commercialized and exploited with the maximum economy and submission possible, complying with the current neoliberal system, making power relations increasingly complex, since these relationships do not emanate from a specific center such as the State, but are diffusely distributed throughout the social fabric and flow from all angles.

Another important point about disciplining bodies, according to Foucault (2013, p.154).

It combines the techniques of the hierarchy that oversees and those of the sanction that normalizes. It is a normalizing control, a surveillance that allows qualifying, classifying and punishing. It establishes a visibility over individuals through which they are differentiated and sanctioned. This is why, in all discipline devices, the exam is highly ritualized.

The school practices evaluation, which are the exams carried out since the child's arrival in the classroom, in which their behavior, their learning capacity, what they already know and how they relate to each other become characteristics that need to be observed and noted. Each activity carried out; the development of fine and gross motor coordination; how the child sees himself in space or how he identifies himself (identity); the family from which it originates; aspects of

hygiene, food, health, among others, are data collected, analyzed, compared and classified.

The Evaluative Forms and the Pedagogical Reports are instruments considered official by the school and filed in the students' individual folders. Cases considered serious are taken to the Class Council, which discusses strategies on how to help the child submit to the norm. Examples of actions taken are: talking to those responsible to guide them regarding family education or asking them to seek medical-psychological help; in cases of negligence by the family, the case is forwarded to the tutelary council, social or psychological assistance.

It is possible to observe that the accumulated documentation about the school and private life of the child, which is filed at the school, objectifies and subjects the individual to the disciplinary power of constant surveillance and the normalizing sanction that compares and classifies him, transforming him into a case. That is, concomitant to the forces of docilization and homogenization is the differentiation and individualization of the subject.

In the words of Foucault (2013, p. 160),

The examination is at the center of the processes that constitute the individual as an effect and object of power, as an effect and object of knowledge. It is he who, combining hierarchical surveillance and normalizing sanction, performs the great disciplinary functions of distribution and classification, maximum extraction of forces and time, continuous genetic accumulation, optimal composition of aptitudes. Therefore, manufacturing cellular, organic, genetic and combinatorial individuality. With it, those disciplines are ritualized that can be characterized with a word saying that they are a modality of power to which individual difference is pertinent.

From the collection, classification and storage of data, it is possible, through the examination, to transform each individual into a specific case. This individualization

makes it possible to follow the development of the child and how to interfere in this development so that from individual control one can reach collective control within the institution of kidnapping and consequently society, thus creating a mass of docile and disciplined bodies willing to exercise without the need for the use of force. Thus, the subject becomes objectified: a case to be analyzed, molded, disciplined. Hoffman (2018, p. 50), argues that “the objectification of individuals became a means for their subjection and the subjection of individuals became the means for their objectification”

## **THE PANOPTIC POWER FOR SELF-SUBJECTION**

Individual and collective control within the institution of kidnapping is found by Foucault in the architectural design for Jeremy Bentham’s model prison, the Panopticon, a circular building with several cells, one for each subject to be corrected, with barred doors facing outwards. The interior and windows that open to the outside. In the center of the building there is a tower, artificially lit, with several floors and large windows with a watchman who observes all the inmates under its shutters and partitions. Hoffman (2018, p. 50, 51), states that:

these characteristics make the Panopticon a magnificent machine not only for bonding, but also for self-bonding. By inducing in detainees an awareness of their own constant visibility, the Panopticon compels them to structure their own behavior according to their mechanism of power. Notably absent from this ideal process is any reliance on violence or a show of force.

Foucault (2013, p. 170), stresses that the Panopticon is multipurpose and serves to exercise disciplinary power not only about detainees, but also:

take care of the sick, instruct schoolchildren,

guard the insane, supervise the workers, make the beggars and idlers work. (...) Every time we are dealing with a multiplicity to which a task or behavior must be imposed, the panoptic scheme can be used.

The panoptic system is an effective way of exercising power, disciplining individuals and instilling in them docility as the natural and necessary for the proper functioning of society. This is the so-called disciplinary society, described by Foucault as a generalized surveillance movement multiplied by the increase in disciplinary institutions.

The school serves as an observatory that penetrates society from its inmates, since by observing the child one obtains data about those responsible and their care relationship with the children, thus allowing the interference of institutions of power - in life families - who use the power conferred on them to discipline individuals who do not submit to what is considered normal.

In public schools, children’s data are collected by the State for the application of Social Assistance Programs that require good care, food, health, hygiene and school attendance of children to maintain the program for families in vulnerable situations. This exercise of power by the State is guaranteed by the panoptic system of surveillance in which all of society and institutions take turns in the surveillance of children and families who are under the care of the State.

Although the panoptic model idealized by Bentham is not applied in the institutions of kidnapping as in its original form, it is possible to verify in the school the same ideology of power, which observes everyone, without, however, individuals knowing who or when they are being observed. This concealment from the constant gaze engenders self-surveillance, denunciation and role changes in power relations, regardless of whether they are students, employees or managers. Depending on the position that the



individual occupies, he is guaranteed different possibilities for the exercise of power, thus, inside the school, everyone is monitored, regulated and examined in detail.

However, power relations are criticized for restricting the freedom of the subject by repressing, excluding, censoring and objectifying him, it is worth remembering that, according to Foucault (2013, p. 161), power “produces reality; produces fields of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that one can have of him originates in this production”. Thus, it is possible to have communication and coexistence between individuals allowing the existence of a disciplinary society. That is, “even if we are not all equally disciplined, we all understand – or must understand... - what it means to be and how to be disciplined” (VEIGA-NETO, 2017, p. 71).

The family, society, the State and the kidnapping institutions work together so that the Norm is considered necessary and useful for the proper functioning of society, thus, it becomes subjectivated in the bodies and minds of children. And by becoming naturalized since childhood, it seeks to prevent the questioning and transgression of the rules imposed by power. However, power relations themselves transform norms, keeping power/knowledge in constant motion, as the production of knowledge predisposes questions and questioning is one of the ways in which power is constituted as it was previously stated, power relations are made up of knowledge, that is, knowledge constitutes power. Therefore, power is exercised by all.

In the classroom, power relations can be described as a complex web in which the teacher apparently holds the maximum power. However, among children, relationships produce and alternate the power that is exercised in games or in the exercise of the

role of “helper of the day!”<sup>1</sup>. The teacher’s power can be challenged by the children themselves who remind the teacher of school rules and correct her in case of transgression. Children exercise power when they report to their parents some behavior that occurred in the classroom, which they consider to be out of the ordinary, and parents use power by questioning the school about the situation. Thus, in a community everyone is observed and exercises power. This fact makes it natural and necessary for the proper functioning of society in which everyone understands its usefulness. By observing everyone and being observed by everyone, each individual contributes to maintaining the power relations that constitute modern society.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Foucault’s theorizations are fundamental for understanding the school as an institution for disciplining bodies and serving society as a trainer of docile subjects who understand discipline as useful and necessary for the well-being of the entire community.

The disciplining techniques exercised by the school are effective in making the bodies of children docile, who understand the norm as the natural and necessary for the proper functioning of the power relations that develop at school and prepare them for life outside of it, such as in the job market. and/or in hospitals.

It is noticed that the constant surveillance of the panoptic model ensures the naturalness of disciplinary power, since all individuals are under surveillance and exercise power over each other, regardless of their social positions, as the position of power can vary within knowledge relationships, such as a child who denounces a teacher for bad behavior, or a director who is denounced by a parent or collaborator.

1 Child who performs tasks such as: helping the teacher with the organization of the class, supervising colleagues, delivering messages to the coordination, among others.

From this perspective, it is possible to analyze power as a complex web of relationships that is transformed from the actions of individuals who can question, rebel and not submit to the norm, but will still be within power relationships, exercising it, questioning him or submitting to him. For, questioning produces knowledge and this, in turn, changes the rules that affect the imposed norms, giving power to some subject to the detriment of another, in the power relations that move society in a constant, transforming it.

Although the docility of bodies is subjectivized slowly throughout school life, throughout life the subject is permeated by the disciplining techniques of the hierarchical gaze, the normalizing sanction and the examination that controls and objectifies him and submits him to the norms instituted by the school, by the factory, by the hospital, in physical and mental health care and in extreme cases of non-subordination, prison.

Thus, it is up to the school as the first kidnapping institution to exercise power over the lives of most individuals, to naturalize disciplinary power so that other institutions reinforce the same ideology in a more economical and subtle way. In other words, the school succeeds in its function by preparing the subject for a disciplined, useful and adaptable life, with high rates of submission and use of its potential.

Given this, it is possible to raise questions and seek answers about how authoritarianism occurs in kidnapping institutions such as militarized schools and prisons that inhibit power relations and prevent people from exercising knowledge/power, as well as the withdrawal of power from other institutions such as public schools that have been suffering interference and losing autonomy and disciplinary power to the detriment of the psychologization and pathologization of

children who become increasingly incapable of naturalizing the disciplines. These are questions that the present work considers relevant for the deepening of the study of the relations of knowledge/power that constitute modern society.

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