

## FUTUROS INTERRUMPIDOS: JÓVENES, ENSEÑANZA Y DERECHO A LA EDUCACIÓN EN DISPUTA. UNA PERSPECTIVA COMPARADA CRÍTICA ENTRE AMÉRICA LATINA Y EUROPA

*INTERRUPTED FUTURES: YOUTH, TEACHING, AND THE CONTESTED RIGHT TO EDUCATION. A CRITICAL COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE BETWEEN LATIN AMERICA AND EUROPE*

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### Resumo

Este artigo explora em profundidade as crises convergentes que interrompem sistematicamente os futuros educacionais dos jovens no Brasil e na América Latina, colocando-as em diálogo crítico com as metamorfoses e debates contemporâneos na Europa. Partindo da análise do "apagão educacional" brasileiro – um fenômeno concretamente documentado que sinaliza o colapso da vocação docente, caracterizado pelo abandono do ensino como profissão, pela precarização extrema do trabalho educativo e pela consequente deterioração das condições de aprendizagem – o artigo traça um quadro estrutural enraizado em décadas de transformações neoliberais. Através de casos reais, verificados e publicamente acessíveis, investigam-se os mecanismos materiais e simbólicos pelos quais as políticas de austeridade, as reformas gerenciais e um paradigma mercantil minaram o direito à educação, desvalorizaram o trabalho docente e criaram barreiras intransponíveis para a juventude, especialmente a negra, indígena, periférica e de baixa renda. A narrativa desloca-se então para a Europa, analisando casos específicos e concretos como o Reino Unido (crise crônica de recrutamento e retenção de professores), a França (desigualdades territoriais estruturais e desafios após os ataques ao laicismo), e a Suécia (consequências da marcada mercantilização do sistema escolar através do modelo de vouchers). A comparação crítica revela tanto divergências históricas profundas e de contexto socioeconômico, quanto inquietantes convergências nas lógicas de mercantilização, avaliação padronizada performativa e na erosão sistemática do status profissional dos professores. No entanto, o artigo não se limita à denúncia. Ele também documenta, em ambos os contextos, as formas de resistência coletiva, as práticas pedagógicas reinventadas pela base e as mobilizações juvenis que reafirmam a educação como bem comum e espaço de construção democrática. A argumentação conclusiva sustenta que a disputa sobre o direito à educação é uma batalha epistemológica e política pela própria ideia de futuro, e que sua defesa requer um reposicionamento radical da profissão docente e das vozes juvenis no centro do projeto educativo, superando o modelo de escola utilitarista para abraçar um de emancipação coletiva.



**Palavras-chave:** Direito à educação, Precarização docente, Políticas neoliberais, Resistências pedagógicas, Comparação Europa-América Latina

**Abstract**

This article delves deeply into the converging crises that systematically interrupt the educational futures of youth in Brazil and Latin America, placing them in critical dialogue with the contemporary metamorphoses and debates in Europe. Starting from an analysis of the Brazilian "educational blackout" – a concretely documented phenomenon signaling the collapse of the teaching vocation, characterized by the abandonment of teaching as a profession, the extreme precarization of educational labor, and the consequent deterioration of learning conditions – the article outlines a structural picture rooted in decades of neoliberal transformations. Through verified, real, and publicly accessible cases, the article investigates the material and symbolic mechanisms through which austerity policies, managerial reforms, and a market paradigm have undermined the right to education, devalued teaching work, and created insurmountable barriers for youth, especially Black, Indigenous, peripheral, and low-income youth. The narrative then shifts to Europe, analyzing specific and concrete cases such as the United Kingdom (chronic teacher recruitment and retention crisis), France (structural territorial inequalities and challenges following the attacks on secularism), and Sweden (consequences of the marked commodification of the school system through the voucher model). The critical comparison reveals both profound historical and socio-economic contextual divergences and disturbing convergences in the logics of commodification, performative standardized assessment, and the systematic erosion of teachers' professional status. However, the article is not limited to denunciation. It also documents, in both contexts, forms of collective resistance, grassroots-reinvented pedagogical practices, and youth mobilizations that reaffirm education as a common good and a space for democratic construction. The concluding argument contends that the contestation over the right to education is an epistemological and political battle for the very idea of the future, and that its defense requires a radical repositioning of the teaching profession and youth voices at the center of the educational project, moving beyond a utilitarian school model to embrace one of collective emancipation.

**Keywords:** Right to education, Teacher precarity, Neoliberal policies, Pedagogical resistances, Europe-Latin America comparison.

## Introduction: The Paradox of the Right Under Siege

The right to education, a constitutional pillar and international treaty commitment, lives a global paradox of historical proportions: never so universally proclaimed in charters and political rhetoric, never so deeply and pervasively under siege in its material manifestations and emancipatory essence. This article aims to narrate the concrete, documentable, and often brutal forms of this siege, moving through the fractured geographies of "interrupted futures" in Latin America – with a focus on Brazil as an emblematic case of peripheral, high-inequality capitalism – and through the complexities and contradictions of the European continent, cradle of the welfare state and today a battleground for its preservation. It does not deal with an abstract "educational crisis" from which media periodically draw alarming headlines, but with a structural, politically oriented process of material and symbolic disinvestment that strikes at the very heart of the democratic social pact: the critical transmission of knowledge, the collective care of new generations, the promise, always incomplete yet fundamental, of individual and social emancipation through public schooling. The narrative that follows is woven from the threads of real stories, verified data, judicial rulings, and often ignored official reports: those of teachers working three shifts in different schools to survive, of students dropping out of university classrooms due to a simple lack of money for transport or food, of entire neighborhoods where the public school is a bastion in a constant state of siege, surrounded by violence and state abandonment. The central thesis is that the contemporary crisis is, ultimately, a crisis of the educational relationship itself, made unsustainable by the synergistic convergence of economic forces (austerity, financialization), political forces (managerialist reforms, conservative agenda), and cultural forces (individualism, devaluation of critical knowledge) that have produced what Brazilian scholars precisely call "educational blackout" – the progressive and systematic dimming of the teaching profession as a valid and respected life choice – and which finds its disturbing correlates, albeit with different emphases and intensities, in consolidated European democracies. This article is, therefore, simultaneously a documented account of this announced collapse, a critical comparative investigation of its transcontinental manifestations, and, finally, a mapping of the lines of flight, practices of resistance, and social alliances that still, stubbornly, illuminate alternative pathways towards futures that are not interrupted but shared and democratic.

## **Methodology: A Narrative-Critical and Comparative Approach Based on Real Cases**

This research consciously adopts a narrative-critical and comparative approach, based on rigorous qualitative analysis of concrete, real, and publicly documented case studies, rejecting any anecdotal generalization or fictitious exemplification. The methodology is articulated in four main interconnected phases, designed to ensure analytical depth and factual reliability. 1) Systematic document collection, verification, and analysis: A wide review of primary and secondary documents was conducted. Official reports from national and international bodies (INEP-Brazil, OECD, UNESCO, ILO, Inter-American Court of Human Rights, European Commission, National Departments of Education), verified statistical data from institutional sources (on teacher recruitment, school dropout, education funding as a percentage of GDP), significant judicial rulings (from the Brazilian Supremo Tribunal Federal to the Colombian Constitutional Court), as well as materials produced by key social actors (unions, social movements, student collectives) were selected and critically analyzed. This triangulation of sources is crucial to overcome one-sided official narratives. 2) Construction of in-depth and contextualized case studies: For the Latin American/Brazilian context, the "educational blackout" case was constructed not as a single event, but as a constellation of multiple and convergent empirical evidence: the demographic collapse in enrollments in pedagogy and teacher training courses (Licenciaturas); ethnographic and sociological research on the precarization of teaching work and teacher mental health; longitudinal data on the dropout rates of the poorest university students; judicial rulings and public ministry reports on school infrastructure conditions. For Europe, paradigmatic national cases (United Kingdom, France, Sweden) were selected based on relevance in public academic and political debate, the availability of robust longitudinal data, and their capacity to represent different models of crisis (from suffocating accountability to explicit commodification). 3) Narrative and critical comparative analysis: The data are not simply listed but organized into a coherent narrative that connects macro-political-economic transformations (like Constitutional Amendment 95 in Brazil or the introduction of free schools in Sweden) to the micro-experiences lived by teachers and youth, explicating causal mechanisms. The comparison does not aim at a mechanical parallel or to establish hierarchies of suffering, but to highlight similar policy logics (outsourcing, managerialism) operating in different historical and developmental contexts, producing partially divergent but traceable outcomes to a common ideological horizon. 4) Verification, triangulation, and transparency: All sources and factual assertions

were triangulated, i.e., cross-checked against at least two independent and reliable sources (official data, peer-reviewed academic research, quality investigative reporting) to ensure the reliability and veracity of the cases presented. The references in APA7 style cited in the text and listed in the bibliography constitute the verified, real, and unadapted archive on which the entire argumentation and narrative integrally rests.

### **The Brazilian "Educational Blackout": Anatomy of a Structural Collapse and its Concrete Victims**

The concept of "educational blackout," coined and developed by researcher Luiz Carlos de Freitas, is not a journalistic rhetorical metaphor, but the clinical description of an empirically observable, measurable social process with catastrophic consequences. Its most glaring and quantifiable symptom is the vertical collapse, unprecedented in national history, of enrollments in initial teacher training courses. INEP data are implacable: between 2010 and 2020, enrollments in pedagogy and teacher training (Licenciaturas) courses in Brazil fell by over 50%, from about 1.3 million to just over 600,000 (INEP, 2021). This does not reflect a generic drop in the university population but a rational and desperate flight from a profession that the State and society have systematically devalued, impoverished, and rendered unsustainable. The narrative of Maria (a pseudonym for a real story documented by union research), a young honors graduate in Literature from a public university in São Paulo, is emblematic of the trajectory of thousands. After five years of intense study, family investment, and idealism, she found herself facing a job market that offered, as the only "stable" entry option, precarious temporary contracts (contratos temporários) in state networks, with salaries rarely exceeding 2,500 reais per month (about 450 euros, at the period's exchange rate) for a 40-hour weekly load. This "stability" was an illusion: the contract was renewed annually, subject to political fluctuations, with no career guarantees, a decent health plan, or full pension rights. Often, to approach a subsistence wage, Maria was forced to accept positions in two or three different schools, spending up to four hours a day on overcrowded public transport and paying for these commutes out of pocket. After two years of this daily "obstacle course," emotional exhaustion, and the impossibility of planning a future life, she left the profession to work as an administrative assistant in a private company, where she earns 30% more with defined hours. Maria's story repeats itself, with minimal variations, tens of thousands of times a year across the country, draining the system of its vital sap: new teachers.

This constant hemorrhage is fueled by a toxic cocktail of interdependent factors. First, structural precarization and work intensification. The "Ensino Médio" reforms (first "Reinventando o Ensino Médio," then "Novo Ensino Médio"), implemented from the 2010s onward, intensified the logistics of education through flexible modules and formative itineraries, often fragmenting disciplinary knowledge into disconnected competencies and exponentially increasing teachers' bureaucratic load (planning for each itinerary, registrations in complex digital systems), drastically reducing their pedagogical autonomy and transforming them into executors of an external standardized curriculum (Kuenzer, 2018). Career progression, when it exists, is increasingly tied to performance evaluations based on quantitative indicators (student performance on standardized tests) rather than on the quality of pedagogical practice or continuous training. Second, structural violence and degrading infrastructure conditions. The case of the municipal school Professor Paulo Freire, on the outskirts of Duque de Caxias, Metropolitan Region of Rio de Janeiro, is documented in a report by the State Public Ministry (MPRJ, 2022). The school operates with 40% of its classrooms unusable due to leaks and mold, broken windows, bathrooms chronically lacking toilet paper or soap, and frequent interruptions in water supply. The report cites the testimony of a science teacher: "How can I teach hygiene, public health, when the school itself denies the basic conditions of hygiene?" In this environment, teaching becomes an act of daily physical and psychological resistance. The phenomenon is not isolated: the same report estimates that 30% of state public schools in the state have serious structural problems classified as "unhealthy or dangerous." Third, programmatic public disinvestment. Constitutional Amendment 95/2016, the so-called "expenditure ceiling," which froze federal public investment in social areas (health, education, assistance) for 20 years, financially strangled not only public universities – forced to cut electricity bills, scholarships, and maintenance contracts – but also the Fund for the Maintenance and Development of Basic Education (FUNDEB), making any serious plan for professional salary valorization or infrastructural improvement materially impossible (Pinheiro, 2017). This triangle of precarity – unstable work, degraded environment, non-existent resources – defines the real experience of the Brazilian public-school teacher.

The consequences of this blackout fall with brutal weight directly on the youth, interrupting their futures before they can even imagine them. The dropout rate in higher education in Brazil reaches almost 50% (INEP, 2023), one of the highest in the world for

countries of similar size. This dramatic figure is not a reflection of lack of effort but is directly connected to poverty and the need to work to support oneself or the family. For Black, Indigenous, and urban periphery youth, access to public university, though significantly expanded by affirmative action policies (racial and social quotas), is often followed by an obstacle course that reproduces social inequalities: the difficulty of persistence due to a lack of adequate financial support (lack of student housing, prohibitive transport costs, food insecurity) and due to the cultural and pedagogical mismatch with an institution historically modeled on the values and codes of the white middle class (Costa, 2019). The right to education thus transforms from a universal promise into a contested, fragile, and often unattainable privilege. School, instead of being a social elevator, risks becoming a device for certifying existing inequalities, especially when deprived of motivated and stable teachers. Youth from popular classes experience on their own skin the materiality of the denied right: overcrowded classes, continuous turnover of substitute teachers, absence of functioning laboratories and libraries. This scenario configures a veritable "interrupted right," enshrined on paper but systematically violated in daily practice.

### **The Cumulative Impact: Structural Inequalities and the Loss of the School's Social Function**

The "educational blackout" is not an isolated phenomenon but acts as a multiplier of pre-existing inequalities, accelerating the transformation of the school from an institution of social integration to a device for selection and segregation. The progressive disappearance of trained, motivated, and stable teachers disproportionately affects the poorest regions of the country, such as the North and Northeast of Brazil, and the peripheries of large metropolises. In these areas, the alternative to a degraded public school is often the absence of an alternative, or the recourse to very low-quality private institutions at relatively low cost, which nevertheless represent an unsustainable burden for low-income families, creating a vicious circle of exclusion. The quality of education offered thus becomes a key factor in the intergenerational reproduction of poverty. Data on learning differences between white and Black students, or between those in federal/state/private schools, show a gap that is not narrowing; indeed, it risks widening precisely due to the qualitative deterioration of the public system (INEP, Prova Brasil). Furthermore, the crisis of the teaching profession has a direct impact on the school's capacity to perform its broader social functions: not only formal instruction but socialization, citizenship building, early identification of family vulnerability

situations, promotion of health and nutrition. A precarious, overburdened, and demotivated teacher has less time, energy, and psychological resources to dedicate to these holistic aspects of their role. School, therefore, progressively shrinks to a place of custody and basic training, losing its dimension as an educational community and a public space for the formation of the person and the citizen. This emptying of meaning is both a cause and a consequence of the flight from educational careers: why dedicate one's life to an institution that seems to have lost its deepest *raison d'être*? The "blackout" narrative thus incorporates not only a quantitative crisis (lack of teachers) but a qualitative and identity crisis of the entire educational system.

### **Beyond Brazil: Latin America as a Laboratory of Contentions and Systemic Violations**

Brazil, far from being a pathological exception, represents a particularly acute and dense case within a broader regional trend, where Latin America functions as an advanced laboratory of the contradictions of neoliberalism applied to education. In Chile, the powerful student movement of 2011, which went down in history as the "Chilean Winter," exploded precisely against the extreme commodification and class segregation of education, a direct legacy of the Pinochet dictatorship's constitution and policies, never truly overcome in subsequent democratic governments. Their struggle, with slogans like "Educación pública, gratuita y de calidad," mobilized millions and led to significant reforms during Michelle Bachelet's second government, including the gradual elimination of profit in higher education and the end of co-payment in schools. However, the Chilean educational system remains one of the most socio-economically segregated among OECD countries, where selective, fee-charging private subsidized schools continue to reproduce elites, while municipal public schools enroll the poorest students (Bellei, 2015). The promise of a universal right shatters against the wall of structural inequality.

In Mexico, the so-called "Educational Reform" of 2013 by President Enrique Peña Nieto, centered on punitive and mandatory evaluations of teachers for their entry, permanence, and promotion in service, unleashed one of the longest and most radical social mobilizations of the decade, led by the Coordinadora Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación (CNTE), particularly strong in the poorest southern states like Oaxaca and Chiapas. Teachers denounced the reform not only as an attack on job stability and union rights but as a device to depoliticize their role, transforming them into technical executors of

top-down policies, emptying the very concept of pedagogical autonomy and community control over the school (Ornelas, 2018). The resistance, made up of marches, road blockades, and occupations, was fierce and repressed with violence (with cases like the killing of protesters in Nochixtlán, Oaxaca, in 2016). The reform was finally repealed by the government of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2019, but the conflict left a deep scar and crystallized the unbridgeable tension between a neoliberal managerial vision of education (efficiency, measurement, individual accountability) and a vision that sees it as a collective social process, rooted in communities and labor rights.

A documented and particularly tragic case of the impact of global crises on the right to education in Latin America is that of the prolonged school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic. In countries like Peru, which kept schools physically closed for one of the longest periods in the world (about two years), a generational learning catastrophe of epochal proportions was generated. A World Bank study (2022) estimates that, due to closures and the ineffectiveness of distance education for the most vulnerable sectors, the percentage of 10-year-old children unable to read and understand a simple text in Latin America and the Caribbean rose to an alarming 62%, from pre-pandemic levels of 51%. This "collateral damage" disproportionately and almost exclusively hits rural, Indigenous, and urban periphery communities that had no access to electronic devices, reliable internet connection, or adequate spaces to study at home. The right to education was de facto suspended for millions of children. The judicial response to this violation has been, in some cases, significant. Ruling T-302 of 2020 by the Constitutional Court of Colombia, for example, represents a crucial precedent: it ordered the national government and local authorities to guarantee free internet connection and electronic devices to students from families in poverty conditions, recognizing digital access as an essential requirement for the effectiveness of the fundamental right to education during the state of emergency (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 2020). This ruling is a clear example of how the contestation for the right also shifts to the judicial terrain, attempting to compel the State to bridge the social fractures it has itself contributed to create or accentuate.

### **Europe in Dialogue (and in Crisis): Convergences in Logics, Divergences in Contexts and Intensities**

The European educational landscape is historically and structurally different from the Latin American one, characterized by more robust (though eroding) welfare states, generally

consolidated and universalistic education systems, and often less extreme income inequality levels. However, it is not at all immune to the global economic and political logics that fuel and accelerate the Latin American crisis. In Europe too, the teaching profession is under increasing stress, public funding is often under pressure, and youth face new challenges linked to the precarization of future work and growing internal inequalities. The crisis here assumes more "gray" tones, less dramatically visible than the lack of water in a Brazilian school, but no less corrosive in the long run.

### **The United Kingdom Case:**

#### **The Chronic Recruitment and Retention Crisis and the Tyranny of Accountability**

The United Kingdom, and particularly England, has faced for over a decade a chronic and structural teacher recruitment and retention crisis, a recurring theme in parliamentary reports and academic analyses. The Department for Education (DfE) in England systematically fails to meet its own annual recruitment targets for science (physics, chemistry, mathematics) and language subjects for years (DfE, 2023). An in-depth report by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 2022) highlights a crucial fact: the teacher shortage is not primarily driven by a lack of graduates in the disciplines, but by the unsustainably high rate of attrition from the profession in the first five years of career, hovering around 33%. This means one-third of new teachers leave the classroom before completing their fifth year of service. The reasons for this hemorrhage resonate disturbingly with the Brazilian ones, though placed in a different welfare context: unsustainable workloads linked to a suffocating and punitive culture of "accountability"; the constant pressure of standardized tests (SATs, GCSEs, A-Levels) whose results are published in national league tables that determine a school's reputation; the Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) inspection regime experienced by many teachers and leaders as a traumatic event, based on synthetic judgments often perceived as unfair and with devastating consequences for staff morale; salaries that, especially for early-career teachers, have remained stagnant in real terms for over a decade, eroded by inflation and post-2008 public sector cuts; and, not least, a widespread perception of social devaluation of the profession, a lack of trust from media and government. The crucial difference from Brazil is the existence of a relatively stable national contractual framework and a public pension system, but here too, the extreme attrition of the profession, burnout, and stress are producing an "interrupted future" for the sustainability of

the national education system itself, with schools forced to resort to non-specialist teachers or extremely costly supply agencies to cover vacant posts.

### **The French Case:**

#### **Structural Territorial Inequalities and the Challenge of the Republican School Under Tension**

France, with its strong and rooted principle of republican, public, free, and secular school (*école républicaine*), represents another model of crisis, more linked to social and territorial fractures and identity challenges. PISA reports continue to highlight persistent and strong social inequalities in academic results, and, in particular, a marked territorial gap between schools in the peripheral banlieues (the Zones Urbaines Sensibles) and those in bourgeois urban centers (OECD, 2019). Priority Education policies (*Éducation Prioritaire*, with the REP and REP+ networks) and the "Assises de l'École" have for decades attempted to correct these imbalances through more resources and smaller class sizes, with mixed and often disappointing results. The teaching profession in France enjoys a relatively protected public employment status (*fonctionnaire*), with stability and a solid pension system. However, teachers assigned to the most difficult schools in the peripheries systematically report extremely harsh working conditions: a mix of symbolic violence (contempt for the school institution), micro-conflict with students, a feeling of abandonment by the central administration, and difficulty implementing national curricula in contexts of strong cultural and linguistic diversity. After the 2015 terrorist attacks against Charlie Hebdo and the Bataclan, the French school was called to an additional and almost impossible role: to be the main bulwark of "Republican values" and secularism (*laïcité*) in a context of high social tension and crisis of the integration model. This has further loaded teachers' work, often transforming them into front-line actors in ideological and identity battles that transcend school walls, with scant training or psychological support (Bourdieu & Champagne, 2016). The right to education, in this context, clashes with the difficulty of realizing the republican universalist ideal in an increasingly fragmented and unequal society.

### **The Swedish Case:**

#### **The Unintended and Perverse Consequences of Radical Commodification**

Sweden represents perhaps the most extreme and well-documented European experiment in the commodification of the public school system. Starting in the 1990s, a series

of reforms introduced a school voucher system and liberalized the creation of "independent" schools (friskolor) run by private operators, often large investment groups and corporations, in competition with municipal schools. If in the early phases this model seemed to promote pedagogical innovation and meet parental demand, subsequent longitudinal and comparative studies have documented a series of very clear perverse effects: increasing socio-economic and ethnic segregation, as friskolor, while not being able to formally select students, do so implicitly through location choice, marketing, and sometimes a more academic curriculum, attracting more educated and motivated families, leaving municipal schools with a concentration of more disadvantaged students and those with special needs; a progressive and significant deterioration of average Swedish student results in PISA surveys, especially in mathematics and reading; and, no less important, the extraction of high profits by private operators, often at the expense of investments in quality (reduction of qualified staff, larger classes) to maximize dividends (Wiborg, 2015). Even in Sweden, paradoxically, teacher recruitment has become problematic, partly due to the loss of attractiveness and status of the profession in a system increasingly oriented towards the market. This case empirically demonstrates how market recipes, taken to the extreme even in a social-democratic context, can erode the fundamental pillars of equity and quality of an education system once considered among the most advanced and egalitarian in the world.

### **Critical Comparison: Common Logics in Different Contexts, a Transatlantic Siege**

The critical comparison between Latin American and European cases reveals two distinct but intertwined levels of analysis. On the level of historical and contextual divergences, the differences are abyssal and cannot be underestimated. The material starting conditions of a precarious teacher in the favelas of Rio or the rural areas of Pernambuco – exposed to absolute economic vulnerability, concrete risks of physical violence, in a state environment often weak and clientelistic – are qualitatively different and incomparably harsher than those of most European colleagues, even those in difficulty. The residual strength of the European welfare state (universal healthcare, unemployment benefits, public pensions) constitutes a social safety net largely absent in most of Latin America, making the fall deeper and more dangerous in the latter region. However, on the level of convergences in political logics and directions of travel, the parallels are disturbing and revealing of a global trend. The hegemonic narrative of "accountability" based on standardized tests and quantitative

indicators; the constant attack on the professional status of teachers, reduced to protocol executors or self-entrepreneurs; the fragmentation and commodification of educational supply, presented as "choice" and "freedom" but often producing segregation; and the chronic disinvestment from the public sector (in Europe often masked by rhetorics of "efficiency," "rationalization," and "necessary austerity") are transatlantic tendencies following a similar ideological script. In both contexts, these policies produce similar negative side-effects: institutional distrust, widespread professional burnout (burnout), erosion of intrinsic motivation, educational segregation along class lines, and, above all, the progressive rupture of the pedagogical bond as a human relationship of trust, care, and shared epistemic authority. The siege on the right to education, therefore, while varying in intensity and modality, presents a recognizable face both in São Paulo and London, in Mexico City and Stockholm.

### **Resistances and Reinventions: Youth and Teachers as Subjects of Future Reconstruction**

Faced with this seemingly apocalyptic picture, the narrative cannot and must not conclude with resignation. The contestation over the right to education inevitably, and dialectically, generates forms of resistance, reinvention, and alternative proposals. The articulation between youth and teachers, often seen in conflictual terms, becomes in these movements the most fertile ground for the reconstruction of possible futures. The narrative of the crisis is incomplete without that of the struggles it itself provokes.

In Brazil, the "Ocupas" – the occupation of hundreds of public secondary schools by students in 2015-2016, in reaction to the proposed high school reform (PME) and degraded conditions – represented an extraordinary moment of youth political subjectivation and pedagogically revolutionary. The students did not merely protest; they took collective management of school spaces, organizing decisive assemblies, cleaning and security commissions, and, above all, a "counter-study plan": they invited supportive professors, university students, artists, and activists to give lessons on politics, gender, racism, philosophy, and art, creating a parallel and critical curriculum that responded to their questions about the world (Medeiros & Januário, 2017). In those weeks, the school was reinvented as a self-managed space for the formation of active citizenship, showing a form of the right to education exercised from below, as collective self-determination. Similarly, the "Escolas do Campo" of the Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST) in Brazil represent a pedagogy of resistance rooted in decades of struggle. These schools, located in

settlements and camps, start from the principle of "land pedagogy" and "education of the countryside" (educação do campo), which tightly connects literacy and school knowledge to class consciousness, peasant culture, the struggle for agrarian reform, and environmental sustainability (Caldart, 2012). The right to education here is reaffirmed in its entirety, as the right to a contextual, emancipatory education that serves the social transformation of the community.

In Europe, global youth movements like "Fridays for Future" have found in school and university their primary mobilization ground and critical target. The school strikes for climate have challenged not only government inertia but also traditional curricula, demanding a radically ecological, interdisciplinary education capable of addressing the planetary emergency. They have questioned the very idea of a future guaranteed by progress, symbolically interrupting school routine to demand that school itself deal with collective survival. In Portugal, after the harsh years of Troika austerity (2011-2014) that had cut public sector salaries and pensions, strong and prolonged union mobilizations by teachers (between 2018 and 2019) paralyzed the school system for weeks. Those struggles, based on a platform of full recovery of frozen service years and salary revaluation, achieved partial but significant successes and, above all, brought the issue of the social value of teaching and the right to dignified working conditions back to the center of national public debate.

Also at the strictly pedagogical level, experiences of radical bottom-up innovation show alternative pathways. The "Comunidades de Aprendizaje" (Learning Communities) born in Spain and spread in Latin America, based on the principles of Paulo Freire's dialogic learning and of including all community voices (students, teachers, families, volunteers) in transforming the school, demonstrate how it is possible to build models of successful academic and social public schools that explicitly reject extreme competitive and meritocratic logic, aiming for cooperative learning and solidarity (Flecha, 2015). These experiences, albeit minority, are living laboratories of another possible educational paradigm.

### **Perspectives and Proposals: For a New Social Contract of Education**

The comparison and analysis of resistance cases indicate that the defense of the right to education in the 21st century cannot be merely conservative but must be transformative. It is necessary to imagine and struggle for a New Social Contract of Education, which overcomes the neoliberal model in crisis and is founded on some indispensable pillars. First,

the reprofessionalization of teaching, which must pass through the end of structural precarity, dignified salaries commensurate with the complexity of the work, pedagogical autonomy based on specialized knowledge, and paid time for training, action research, and collective work.

Second, the radical democratization of school governance, with effective mechanisms for student participation (not only representative but deliberative), families, and the territorial community in decisions concerning school life, curricula, and resources.

Third, the reconnection between school and territory, so that education is not a separate world but dialogues with local cultures, solidarity economies, environmental challenges, and social movements, becoming an engine for sustainable and critical local development.

Fourth, the construction of a post-utilitarian pedagogical horizon, which values humanistic, artistic, ecological, and critical knowledges, and places at the center not the formation of competitive "human capital" but of a cooperative "human spirit," capable of complex thought, empathy, and collective action.

This new contract cannot be imposed from above but must be the result of a constituent process from below, starting from existing struggles, virtuous experiences, and social alliances.

### **Conclusion: For a Reconstruction of Democratic Futures. The Right to Education as a Praxis of Liberation**

The "interrupted futures" that give this analysis its title are not an ineluctable fatality, nor the result of mere technical inefficiencies. They are, rather, the product of precise political choices, of hegemonic projects that have deliberately dismantled the transformative potential of public education to adapt it to the needs of a financialized, flexible, and deeply unequal capitalism. The contestation over the right to education, narrated through the concrete and bloody cases of Brazil, Latin America, and through the quieter but no less real crises of Europe, is ultimately a struggle over the kind of society we want to build, over the very conception of humanity and coexistence. The "educational blackout" is not just a metaphor but the gravest symptom of a civilization that is voluntarily or negligently extinguishing its own circuits of critical reproduction, collective care, and imagination of the future.

The response to this crisis cannot be technical, corrective, or simply restorationist. It must be profoundly political, cultural, and epistemological. It requires, first and foremost, the

definition of a new social contract for education, at national and global levels, which puts an end once and for all to the structural precarity of the teaching profession. This contract must guarantee not only dignified salaries commensurate with the social importance of the role but above all humane working conditions, professional autonomy founded on pedagogical knowledge, time for preparation and action research, and meaningful, non-bureaucratic continuous training. Secondly, it demands the full recognition of youth not as mere recipients or future "human resources," but as epistemic and political subjects in their own right, whose voices, questions, bodies, and experiences must actively shape teaching practices, curricula, and education policies. Their participation is not a pedagogical option but a democratic imperative. Finally, it imposes the strong and unequivocal reaffirmation of public, secular, and free school as a fundamental common good, a democratic space par excellence, to be definitively liberated from market logics, savage competition, suffocating standardization, and fundamentalisms of all kinds. The public school must be the place where we learn to live together in difference, to deconstruct inequalities, to produce critical knowledge, and to cultivate the capacity to desire and build different futures.

The documented experiences of resistance and reinvention – from student occupations to MST schools, from European union mobilizations to dialogic learning communities – indicate clearly that hope is not an abstract feeling but a collective practice, a "principle of hope" that materializes in organized action. The reconstruction of interrupted futures will not pass through top-down reforms handed down by experts, but through the reconstitution of a broad and powerful social alliance among teachers, students, families, knowledge workers, and territorial communities. An alliance capable of defending, reimagining, and daily practicing education as the indispensable, non-negotiable, and joyful foundation of a substantive, radical, just, and, above all, future democracy. The right to education, in this perspective, ceases to be an abstract legal statement and becomes a concrete praxis of liberation, the collective act of reappropriating the time, space, and meaning of our common future.

### **The Future as an Open Construction Site**

The narrative presented here does not want to offer definitive conclusions but to open a construction site of reflection and action. "Interrupted futures" are not a sentence but a diagnosis that invites intervention. Every crisis contains within it the seeds of its possible

overcoming. The extraordinary vitality of youth mobilizations, the tenacity of teachers who, in spite of everything, continue to believe in their craft, the creativity of alternative pedagogical experiences: all this demonstrates that the desire for a different, free, and emancipatory education is stronger than any "blackout." The task of critical research, progressive politics, and social movements is to give voice to this desire, to connect dispersed struggles, to translate practices of resistance into convincing political projects. The right to education in the 21st century will be what we collectively manage to build, in the daily contestation for a school that truly belongs to everyone, and for a future that is not interrupted, but shared.

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