

ARTICLE

**VERTIGO OF URGENCY: TEACHING WORK AND HEALTH FROM UNION
LEADERS' PERSPECTIVE IN BRAZIL AND PORTUGAL¹**

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ABSTRACT: The primary objective of this study is to examine changes in basic education teaching work from the perspective of teachers involved in union leadership in Brazil and Portugal. The thesis posits that we are experiencing a new phase of capitalist organization of labor processes, in which digital technologies play a significant role in working time with collective consequences for health. Theoretically, the study employs parameters to analyze the limits of work hours, focusing on resistance and political struggle against old forms of exploitation and new forms of domination. In terms of research procedures, a qualitative social research approach was used with teacher unions in both countries, employing different investigative strategies. In Brazil, two workshops were conducted in digital environments with 10 unionists, while in Portugal, individual interviews were carried out with 5 unionists. The field materials were analyzed using thematic analysis, resulting in three main analytical categories: flexibility and alienation of collective working time; technological time, burnout, and the right to disconnect from work; and time of resistance. According to the research participants, both countries experience issues such as overtime work, work overload, and high task volume. Despite the unions' international weakness, they remain important collectives fighting against the degradation of teaching work and advocating for quality education.

¹ Article published with funding from the *Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico* - CNPq/Brazil for editing, layout and XML conversion services.

Keywords: teaching work, digital technologies, teachers' health, labor precariousness, work intensification.

VERTIGEM DA URGÊNCIA: TRABALHO DOCENTE E SAÚDE NA VISÃO DE SINDICALISTAS NO BRASIL E PORTUGAL

RESUMO: O principal objetivo deste estudo consiste em problematizar mudanças ocorridas no trabalho docente da educação básica na perspectiva de professores em exercício de direção sindical no Brasil e em Portugal. Defende-se a tese de que se vive uma nova fase de organização capitalista dos processos de trabalho, na qual as tecnologias digitais possuem relevância no tempo laboral com consequências coletivas para a saúde. No plano teórico, lançou-se mão de parâmetros para estudo dos limites da jornada de trabalho, cuja vertente postula a resistência e a luta política para se contrapor aos antigos modos de exploração e às novas formas de dominação. Quanto aos procedimentos no campo de estudo, adotou-se a pesquisa social de caráter qualitativo junto a sindicatos docentes nos dois países, sendo que as estratégias de investigação foram diferenciadas. No Brasil, foram realizadas duas oficinas em ambientes digitais com dez sindicalistas e em Portugal efetuaram-se entrevistas individuais com cinco sindicalistas. A interpretação dos materiais de campo foi realizada por meio da técnica de análise temática, chegando-se a três categorias principais de análise: flexibilização e alienação do tempo laboral coletivo; hora tecnológica, burnout e o direito à desconexão do trabalho; tempo de resistências. Na perspectiva dos participantes de pesquisa, predominam, em ambos os países, a realização de horas extraordinárias de trabalho, a sobrecarga laboral e a grande quantidade de tarefas. Embora verifique-se a fragilidade dos sindicatos no contexto internacional, ainda se constituem em importantes coletivos que lutam contra a degradação do trabalho docente e a defesa da educação de qualidade.

Palavras-chave: trabalho docente, tecnologias digitais, saúde de professores, precarização do trabalho, intensificação laboral.

VÉRTIGO DE URGENCIA: TRABAJO DOCENTE Y SALUD SEGÚN SINDICALISTAS EN BRASIL Y PORTUGAL

Resumen: El objetivo principal de este estudio es examinar los cambios ocurridos en el trabajo docente de la educación básica desde la perspectiva de profesores que ejercen funciones en la dirección sindical en Brasil y en Portugal. La tesis plantea que estamos viviendo una nueva fase de organización capitalista del trabajo, en la cual las tecnologías digitales juegan un papel relevante en el tiempo laboral con consecuencias colectivas para la salud. Teóricamente, se estudian los límites de la jornada laboral, enfocándose en la resistencia y la lucha política para contrarrestar antiguos modos de explotación y nuevas formas de dominación. El estudio emplea una investigación cualitativa con sindicatos docentes en ambos países, utilizando estrategias de investigación diferenciadas. En Brasil, se realizaron dos talleres en entornos digitales con diez sindicalistas, y en Portugal se llevaron a cabo entrevistas individuales con cinco sindicalistas. La interpretación de los materiales de campo se realizó mediante la técnica de análisis temático, resultando en tres categorías principales de análisis: flexibilización y alienación del tiempo laboral colectivo; hora tecnológica, burnout y el derecho a la desconexión del trabajo; tiempo de resistencias. Para los participantes en la investigación, en ambos países predominan las horas extraordinarias de trabajo, la sobrecarga laboral y la gran cantidad de tareas. Aunque se verifica la fragilidad

de los sindicatos en el contexto internacional, estos siguen siendo colectivos importantes que luchan contra la degradación del trabajo docente y a favor de la educación de calidad.

Palabras clave: trabajo docente, tecnologías digitales, salud de los profesores, precarización del trabajo, intensificación laboral.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, significant changes have occurred in several work processes, particularly regarding working hours and the use of digital technologies. The way we live and work has undergone rapid transformations, with consequences for health that remain unknown, and with knowledge gaps concerning the resistance and reinvention of collective struggles by workers' organizations. In this scenario, struggles from trade unions are considered as an anti-capitalist imperative of our time, yet they also bear the consequences of social contradictions throughout history.

Drawing on Marx (2013), it can be argued that technological changes constitute a significant contradiction for capital that must be analyzed in light of current events and history. In the so-called “Contradiction Eight”, in the book *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*, Harvey (2016) warns that, although we are currently experiencing an exponential expansion of productive forces, understood as technological potential, this growth of capital has proven incapable of generating common well-being due to its alignment with the interests of the ruling class. Furthermore, this contradiction is sustained by the dynamic and innovative domination exercised through different forms of working-class control, among which technological changes in communication and information play a prominent role. According to Harvey (2016), throughout its history, capital has invented and adopted technology within work processes with the primary objective of extending control over labor from within the work process, a strategy involving modes of domination over the “self-discipline of workers” (p. 102).

According to Han (2017), the capitalist system has shifted the mode of worker exploitation toward “self-exploitation” (p. 105). As per the same author, “self-exploitation” (p. 115) is efficient because it goes hand in hand with a sense of (false) freedom. From this perspective, digital technologies gain significance, as mobile devices, such as laptops and smartphones, have become integrated into work processes and, as instruments of labor, contribute to the intensification of the time dedicated to work (Han, 2017). One must recall the Marxist assertion found in “Capital”, according to which “if he [the worker] consumes his available time for himself, he robs the capitalist” (Marx, 2013, p. 307). In agreement with Marx (2013), and updating this observation, it can be argued that the workday (defined by varying physical and social boundaries) is today being reshaped by the intrusion of telematic technologies, which usurp time that ought to be reserved for the worker’s rest, that is, “time for oneself.” On the other hand, following Harvey (2016), it is undeniable that

communication technologies must undergo a categorical metamorphosis to become tools for political action of an anti-capitalist nature.

It is worth noting the imperative of work-related illness stemming from the intense work schedules characteristic of the “society of performance and fatigue” (Han, 2017). Along this line of interpretation, forms of suffering related to mental health, such as burnout syndrome, have gained prominence in recent decades. This syndrome is characterized by signs and symptoms of depletion and exhaustion, notably those associated with the harmful effects of work processes. As of the 11th Revision of the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), the World Health Organization recognizes burnout syndrome as an essentially occupational illness, one that does not constitute a problem of an individual nature, but rather stems from the work environment, a view corroborated by studies involving teachers, such as Calainho, Cruz, and Cerdeira (2022).

We add here a provocative extension of the concept of “burnout” to “technological burnout,” considering that telematic technologies exacerbate worker exhaustion in contemporary work processes (Han, 2017). Thus, it is crucial to consider that the intense use of information technologies can give rise to what authors such as Vieira (2020), Carlotto, and Camara (2010) call “technostress.” This is a cluster of symptoms associated with information overload and the difficulties workers face in adapting to new technologies. Common symptoms and health complaints include headaches, anxiety, attention deficits, and sleep-related difficulties (Souza et al., 2023).

Regarding the relationship between teachers' work and health, particular emphasis must be placed on mental health (Ferreira, 2019; Araújo & Carvalho, 2009). According to Gradella Júnior (2010), the emotional content of tasks plays a central role in teaching work, as it is an activity that involves establishing bonds and affective relationships. In Brazil, studies such as those by Ferreira (2019), Neves and Seligmann-Silva (2006), and Gomes and Brito (2006) highlight experiences of malaise and psychological distress in the workplace, characterized by mental exhaustion, stress, anxiety, irritability, depression, fear, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. In Portugal, mirroring these findings, studies by Borralho, de Jesus, Viseu, and Candeias (2013), as well as those by Calainho, Cruz, and Cerdeira (2022), affirm the prevalence of psychosocial factors among teachers, with stress and burnout standing out as the most common.

Druck (2011) reminded us that the intensification of the workday constitutes a form of the social precariousness of labor, an aspect of capital's metamorphosis under the aegis of neoliberal-oriented policies. To assert that the social precariousness of labor lies at the core of the dynamics of flexible capitalism also implies understanding it as a strategy of domination, one evident, for instance, in management and work-organization practices that impose extended working hours alongside unattainable targets.

Although Brazil and Portugal have distinct social, economic, and political realities, we have observed a convergence between the two countries regarding the phenomena of precarization, intensification, and flexibilization of teaching work, as well as the use of digital

technologies. By way of a brief introduction to the topic, a study by Fernandes and Barbosa (2014) highlights that the technologies in schools' work environments in São Paulo have altered the organization of collective work. Specifically, teachers have begun to assume tasks previously assigned to school administrative staff, such as managing class registers and recording student absences in the system. Consequently, an integrated system dubbed "Digital Secretary" (p. 122) was implemented, through which teachers input student and class data within deadlines established by the State Secretariat of Education. Similarly, in Portugal, a study by Meira (2019) identifies the role of electronic platforms used by educational authorities, which has intensified bureaucracy within the teaching profession. According to the author (Meira, 2019), digital tools have assumed a central role within contemporary frameworks of educational governance, operating through platforms administered by the Ministry of Education. Furthermore, during the COVID-19 pandemic, observations in both countries indicated that the imposition of virtual work in basic education led to an expansion of the flexibilization and precarization of teachers' working conditions.

From this perspective, Previtali and Fagiani (2023) argue that the flexibility of neoliberal capitalism, under the aegis of Industry 4.0, has driven the rise of virtual or digital work, a phenomenon that encompasses basic education in both Brazil and Portugal. This mode of work entails the transfer of information via information and communication technologies, taking the form of digital platforms and their associated applications (p. 291). For the authors, the flexibility afforded by this mode of production and work within the field of education is synonymous with precarization.

Piovezan and Ri (2019) highlight the similarities in the process of intensification and precariousness of teaching work in Brazil and Portugal. Aside from the specific particularities of each country, this process is characterized by an adherence to the neoliberal state model, aiming to reduce the costs of public services, such as health, education, and social security, as well as to curtail labor rights and foster the growth of the private sector to fill the void left by the shrinking public sector. The authors draw attention to general aspects of the intensification of teaching work, such as heavy teaching loads (manifested in increased numbers of schools, classes, lessons, and work shifts) and, consequently, an increase in the number of students served daily. This scenario inevitably imposes constraints on teachers' personal lives, reducing their time for rest, leisure, and socialization. Furthermore, it diminishes opportunities to participate in pedagogical and political activities aimed at realizing a collective school project, as well as opportunities to engage with trade union bodies representing teachers.

Thus, the primary objective of this study is to critically examine changes occurring in teaching work within basic education, focusing on working hours and health from the perspective of unionized teachers in Brazil and Portugal.

The central thesis here is that we are currently experiencing a new phase of the capitalist organization of work processes, one from which the teaching profession has not emerged unscathed. In this context, digital technologies play a significant role in both

working hours and personal life, with collective consequences for health. This concept gained considerable traction and relevance in the interviews conducted with unionized teachers in Brazil and Portugal.

CRITICAL NOTES ON THE STUDY OF WORKING TIME LIMITS

From a historical and theoretical perspective, Marx developed important parameters for analyzing the working day within the capitalist mode of production. Among the analyses undertaken in the texts of “Capital” (Marx, 2013), certain elements stand out. These elements will be presented here with regard to the theme of “The Limits of the Working Day,” the original title of the first section of Chapter 8.

For Marx (2013), the working day is the absolute magnitude of labor-time, which includes “surplus-labor,” that is, the extension of contracted working hours. The theme Marx chose to discuss working days, “limits,” is a central point regarding workers' health, as it exposes the physical limitations workers face in enduring “overwork” and their social and political limitations. In the chapter concerning the limits of the working day, Marx begins to emphasize the idea of the necessity of class struggle in “Capital” (Harvey, 2013). According to Marx (2013), the maximum limit of a working day is doubly determined: first, by the physical limitation of the labor-power, since individuals expend a necessary amount of “vital force” (p. 306) on work during a portion of the day, thereby requiring the satisfaction of other physical needs, such as rest. The other limit, for Marx (2013), is the moral or social limit, which serves to prevent the prolongation of the working day. The worker must satisfy individual and social needs as a moral prerogative. In other words, the social limit refers to family relations and community life, as well as those relations established within the sphere of social interactions at work, thereby imposing political limits, such as those arising from trade union actions.

To reach the limits of daily and weekly working hours, it is necessary to establish constraints upon capital through resistance and political struggle. Thus, Marx (2013) highlights the central point concerning the limits of the working day when he formulates the axiom: “the regulation of the working day is presented, in the history of capitalist production, as a struggle over the limits of the working day” (p. 309).

According to the author of “Capital”, although workdays of widely varying durations exist, a workday invariably consists of less than a full natural day. Marx (2013) points out that, for capital, the objective is to create the greatest possible amount of “surplus value” through “surplus labor” (p. 306). Marx's (2013) observations regarding breaks during the workday and post-work rest periods also merit attention. According to him, in many instances, work processes encroach on Sunday beyond the standard workweek. Thus, although Marx's studies are situated in a 19th-century context, the working class continues

to face dilemmas and engage in struggles against surplus labor, raising questions remarkably similar to those of Marx's era. For Harvey (2013), these constitute enduring civilizational struggles, such as the contestation over the duration of the workweek, the work year (paid vacation), and the working life (retirement age). These are political issues that persist to this day and are considered counter-hegemonic to "disciplinary capitalism" (p. 148). Within this framework, workers must be disciplined to accept the excessive temporal logic of work processes, learning to coexist with it almost unconsciously. Consequently, a crucial boundary to be observed lies precisely in the breaks and the time reserved for rest.

It is worth mentioning Paul Lafargue's work titled "The Right to be Lazy" (Lafargue, 2021), written in 1880, in which the author extols the necessity of rest as a benefit to the human organism. He also highlights the Spanish proverb: "To rest is health" (Lafargue, 2021, p. 61). For Lafargue (2021), the free man ought to dedicate his time to discussing matters of the State and the collective defense of working-class interests, given that wage labor constitutes modern-day slavery. Furthermore, what he terms a "strange madness" is the absence of a collective struggle to change the course of history (Lafargue, 2021, p. 117).

Specifically in Chapter XIII of "Capital", in the sections titled "The Prolongation of the Working Day" (Marx, 2013, p. 475) and "Intensification of Labour" (p. 481), Marx continues to highlight important issues regarding the limits placed upon the working day. The text emphasizes a critique of the tactics employed by industrialists and employers of the era to overcome both worker resistance and 'human limits,' thereby enabling absolute labor exploitation. Particular attention must be drawn to the excerpts recorded by Marx (2013), from the reports of factory inspectors, which drew attention to the preference for employing married women; in the view of employers, "such women are more docile than single women and submit to the most extreme exertions in order to earn their livelihood" (Marx, 2013, p. 475). With regard to both female and child labor, the text reveals the voracity with which employers sought to take advantage of the vulnerabilities and poverty of the working class, circumventing the collective resistance mounted by working-class organizations. In this sense, it can be argued that the social contradictions inherent to the very core of capital, particularly those concerning social inequality and gender relations, were utilized as instruments of domination and exploitation as early as the 19th century. In another excerpt from a factory inspector's report, dating from London in 1844, it is recorded that "Among the female workers, there are women who, for many consecutive weeks, save for a few days, work from 6 a.m. until midnight, with fewer than two hours allotted for meal breaks" (p. 476). Thus, the entire vital time of these female workers is usurped through the unbridled expansion of the working day. These excerpts from "Capital" reveal a typical Victorian-era prejudice (Harvey, 2013), given that docility is not a natural attribute of women. Furthermore, it is well known that women's working time has always extended into a "double shift" of domestic labor—an issue that, even today, remains a powerful focal point in the struggle for women's social liberation and emancipation, particularly regarding the recognition of exploited and unpaid domestic work (Harvey, 2013; Federici, 2019). Thus, one laments and

raises questions regarding the hours of rest available to women, both in the past and in the present. Consequently, the issue of gender emerges as a significant aspect of the limits on working hours—an aspect that, in Marx's framework, is linked to the moral or social dimensions that must be taken into account.

Marx (2013) defines the increase in labor intensity as an increase in speed, “a denser filling of the pores of labor-time” (p. 482), distinct from the prolongation of the working day, which is regarded as an “extensive magnitude” extending beyond the contracted labor-time (p. 482). Finally, Marx (2013) highlights an important clue for studies regarding the limits of working days: the temporal differences inherent to distinct types of labor. These differences must be understood in terms of their specific forms of domination and control over collective time, as well as in the struggles against surplus labor (Harvey, 2013). Regarding the use of technology in the workplace, Marx (2013) states that these technologies create new conditions that incentivize the extension of the working day. Interpreting this point within the text of “Capital”, Harvey (2013, p. 176) poses a highly pertinent question, that remains entirely relevant today, concerning the relationship between the worker and technological tools: “Is it the worker who controls the tool, or is it the tool that controls the worker?”

THEORETICAL-METHODOLOGICAL REFERENCE

The adopted theoretical-methodological reference was guided by the parameters of historical materialism, more specifically, by the theme of the working day as presented in Chapter 8 of “Capital” (Marx, 2013), and, complementarily, by the adoption of the contemporary critical lineage within the field of Workers' Health (Laurell & Noriega, 1989; Oddone et al., 2022; Gomez, 2018). Prominent within this reference are premises such as the centrality of investigations into the concrete reality of working conditions, and the recognition that organizations and historical movements related to workers, such as trade unions, act as agents in the process of fostering health in the workplace (Laurell & Noriega, 1989; Souza & Brito, 2012). Consequently, this study advances the thesis that the health-disease process is historically determined by the organizational capacity of workers; that is, the greater the capacity for organizing the workers' struggle, the greater, too, will be the potential for defending health from a collective perspective. The collective knowledge and experience of workers are indispensable to the production of knowledge in the field of health, all the more so when considering interventions aimed at workplace change (Oddone et al., 2022; Laurell & Noriega, 1989; Souza, 2014).

Regarding the field investigation procedure, a qualitative social study was conducted involving labor unions in Brazil and Portugal, using distinct research strategies. In Brazil, two workshops were held in digital environments (Santos et al., 2022) with teachers currently serving in union leadership positions in Rio de Janeiro. This phase was carried out between December 2022 and March 2023. Ten teachers participated, representing the Union of Teachers of Macaé and Region (SINPRO-Macaé) and the State Union of Education

Professionals of the State of Rio de Janeiro (SEPE-RJ). The selection of these two unions was guided by accessibility criteria, with consideration of the proximity and existing professional ties between the researchers and the union leaders, established through previous research projects.

Regarding participants in Brazil, the study involved 10 teachers, three male and seven female, aged 35 to 55. All held employment positions at schools within both the public and private sectors. In terms of professional experience, they worked in basic education, with service periods ranging from 5 to 30 years. Within the scope of union activity, they also possessed experience ranging from 5 to 30 years. The criteria adopted for inclusion in the study were: being a teacher, belonging to the basic education network, participating in union activities, and agreeing to take part in the research.

The methodology adopted the precepts of Freire's dialogue (Freire, 2014), so during the first workshop, participants spoke freely about returning to in-person activities. From this workshop, significant themes, or generative themes, were selected and subsequently reintroduced and problematized during the second meeting.

In Portugal, the primary research strategy adopted was the conduct of individual interviews. The Northern Teachers' Union (SPN-*Sindicato dos Professores do Norte*) was selected as the field of study. The SPN is a trade union representing educators at the basic, secondary, and higher education levels. The choice of the SPN was driven by the accessibility of its members, based on geographic location, specifically because its headquarters are in Porto, close to the School of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Porto (FPCEUP).

Regarding the inclusion criteria for the teachers participating in the study, they were required to be members of the SPN Directorate during the 2021–2024 term and to be basic education teachers actively engaged in union activities. Five directors from the headquarters district (rather than those from interior districts) were interviewed due to time constraints in conducting the research.

The strategy used for selecting interviewees followed the parameters of the “Snowball” technique (Vinuto, 2014); specifically, we began with a teacher who responded to the research introductory message sent to the official SPN email address. From there, referrals were generated in succession until we reached the final count of five participating teachers. According to this approach, participants are considered key informants, referred to as “seeds,” as they help identify other individuals with the necessary profile to constitute the participant group.

The interviews were conducted in October 2023, and each lasted an average of 1.5 hours. As for the participants' profiles, the group consisted of three female and two male educators, aged between 50 and 70. The marital status of the interviewed female teachers varied: single and childless (1); married with two children aged between 15 and 18 (1); and separated with a child over 18 (1). Regarding the men, both interviewees are married, with one having 2 children and the other having 1, all of whom are over 18. The research

participants hold teaching licenses and bachelor's degrees in diverse fields, such as mathematics, languages, literature, and anthropology. Their highest academic qualifications ranged from a postgraduate specialization (1) to a master's degree (3) and a doctorate (1). All five participants hold stable, permanent employment positions within the public education system. Regarding their tenure in the teaching profession, the shortest was 27 years, and the longest was 37 years. Finally, regarding the time spent in leadership roles within the SPN, the duration ranged from 7 to 34 years; only one interviewee was currently on leave of absence to engage in union-related activities.

All interviews were scheduled and conducted at the union, and at times, we agreed to accommodate the teachers' work schedules and union activism commitments. The dialogue with the teachers was conducted using a semi-structured research protocol, characterized by a guide containing a small number of open-ended questions. As a data collection technique, this approach encourages interviewee spontaneity rather than directing it, thereby allowing research participants to speak freely.

Regarding the analysis of field materials, conducted in both Brazil and Portugal, it was carried out through thematic analysis. Within this approach, the themes identified in the dialogue during workshops and individual interviews were treated as primary units of record for the qualitative content analysis. By selecting excerpts, these themes were grouped based on criteria of similarity, frequency, and relevance relative to the study's objectives, thereby constituting the empirical categories that defined the scope for interpretation or inference (Minayo, 2013).

To protect the identities of the interviewed teachers, a simple code was established that combines the letter P (Professor), followed by H for males and M for females, and, additionally, the letter B for teachers in the Brazil group and P for the Portugal group.

Regarding ethical aspects, the research in Brazil obtained approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Sergio Arouca National School of Public Health (CEP-ENSP) under number 4.115.201. As for the study in Portugal, approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Porto, with opinion Ref. 2023/07-07.

No comparisons or analogies were drawn between the two countries; rather, critical analyses were conducted of the key issues characterizing transformations in teachers' work processes from the perspective of unionized teachers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Given the richness and profusion of the field materials, three thematic categories were selected to interpret the teaching workday and its limits in Brazil and Portugal. The decision to focus on teachers engaged in union activities granted us broad, panoramic access to current political agendas and debates within this professional segment: flexibilization and

alienation of collective working time; “technological time,” burnout, and the right to disconnect from work; and times of resistance.

Flexibilization and Alienation of Collective Working Time

When questioned regarding changes in teaching work processes, both during and after the pandemic, particular emphasis was placed on interpretations that, regardless of the specific geographical and historical context under analysis, converged on the intensification of working time. This validates the premise, central to studies on work processes, that working time is a collective rather than an individual phenomenon (Marx, 2013). Furthermore, reflections emerged regarding the processes of alienation of working time during the pandemic, as well as the loss of a sense of collectivity that persists in the post-pandemic landscape.

The moment I work outside regular hours, I am contributing to an unhealthy work schedule, both for myself and for everyone else, because work hours are not an individual matter; they are collective, negotiated collectively. When I create flexibility for myself, I set a precedent... but when the school requires it, it amounts to unpaid labor, essentially voluntary work (PMP).

What happened was an alienation of time, of family time, work time, and school time, along with immense burnout among the teachers... The workday stretched across every conceivable hour, resulting in an alienation from what life actually entails beyond the realm of work. Being at home and working from home was layered on top of the work teachers were already doing individually in their own homes; this placed a tremendous strain on the teachers (PMP).

I believe the post-pandemic period presents a specific problem... We were constantly emphasizing the need for collectivity, for human connection, for contact, and for exchange. Yet, I feel that the post-pandemic era has not yet delivered on that sense of collective engagement. Our colleagues remain isolated as individuals; they are still operating in isolation... This is something I have identified, a phenomenon that still prevails: the persistence of individuality in the post-pandemic landscape (PMB).

Upon examining the excerpts’ interpretations of working time, work in schools has become both flexible and intensified, even before the pandemic. The concept of schedule flexibility appears to signify a loss of control, as evidenced by scheduling hours outside the contracted working time. It is precisely this sense that prevails in Marx’s writings (2013): namely, that the alienation of working time concerns the loss of control over the work process itself, and that a loss of collective autonomy occurs when individual workers forgo the limits established by the contractual rules governing the workday. Indeed, working time becomes alienated when “the temporal regime of workers is dictated by labor conditions within the work process” (Harvey, 2024, p. 173) and becomes alien to the collective workforce the moment decision-making favors the performance of surplus labor. The critiques voiced by Portuguese trade unionists complement those of their Brazilian counterparts, expressing concern about the lack of collective work in the post-pandemic context—a context in which, in their view, individuality and isolation now prevail.

The decline of bonds of solidarity among workers is a characteristic feature of the neoliberal world of work (Harvey, 2016). More than forty years of neoliberalism worldwide have left the working class vulnerable for challenges, with little to no social protection from the State and with fragile networks of solidarity (Castel, 2015). This landscape of uncertainty and new forms of labor precarization appears to have deepened with the pandemic. We are confronted with a new challenge regarding the political and social organization of workers, as the collective bonds previously grounded in physical proximity will no longer exist with the same intensity, particularly in an era of telematic relations (Souza et al., 2023).

During the study, the political awareness of contemporary forms of alienation of working time, such as “teacher overwork”, has emerged as a significant and current agenda item for Portuguese trade unions. This was evidenced in an article published on the union’s own website, titled “Strike against overwork, overtime, and the non-teaching component of school-based duties” (WEBSITE SPN, 2023a).

The trade union organizations [...] decided to call for strikes against excessive workload, overtime, and all activities falling under the non-teaching component of school operations, effective September 12, 2023, the first day of the academic year. Despite the insistence of trade union organizations, the Ministry of Education took no action to regularize teachers' working hours or to eliminate the abuses and illegalities that, in many schools, compel teachers to work far beyond the 35-hour weekly limit established by law (WEBSITE SPN, 2023a).

The theme of the struggle to establish limits on working hours, both in Brazil and in Portugal, was timely and potent. Lelis (2012) notes that teachers' work is characterized by intensification and increasing complexity. The author argues that, in addition to increased working time, there has been an expansion of tasks. This constitutes significant changes in labor conditions that engender feelings of professional malaise and alienation, with consequences for health. The author further posits that one of the major changes in teaching practice is precisely the role of information and communication technologies.

In practice, it is observed that overtime hours are still normalized. It appears that the excessive workload and the sheer volume of tasks teachers perform (falsely) justify this “extra work”, as illustrated in this interview excerpt from a Portuguese union representative: “We have received various reports from people who work 45, 48 hours a week” (PMP).

In Brazil, the duties prescribed by legislation primarily include leading classes and delivering lessons. Therefore, work that is specifically geared toward classroom instruction. Thus, drawing on Fernandes and Barbosa (2023), it can be argued that the time allocated to work outside the classroom contributes to the exploitation and intensification of teaching labor, insofar as it is frequently performed without remuneration and outside scheduled class time.

In Portugal, the trade union struggle focuses on demanding compliance with the terms established in employment contracts. In Brazil, the fight also centers on enforcing provisions already enshrined in legislation, provisions that, however, often remain unimplemented. A prime example is the struggle for the recognition of the national minimum

wage law for teachers, which, in addition to setting a minimum remuneration rate, mandated that at least one-third of a teacher's total working hours be allocated to non-classroom activities (BRASIL, 2008). The unionized struggle waged by teachers against work intensification is by no means a recent phenomenon, regardless of whether the work is conducted in a traditional face-to-face setting or through technological means. Consequently, the debate surrounding the concept of the “Technological Work Hour” has emerged as a critical response to new modes of temporal organization characterized by telematic technologies.

Technological Hours, Burnout, and the Right to Disconnect from Work

From the dialogues held with teachers regarding the relationship between teaching work, working hours, and health, the term “technological hour” emerged, a concept developed within the context of teachers’ union struggles in Brazil. The technological hour can be defined as the intensification of teachers' work within a digital environment, a new modality of out-of-class work time of a telematic nature. It refers to teaching activities performed through the use of information and communication technologies, such as educational platforms, outside of the contracted working hours (Souza; Santos; Rodrigues, 2024). The technological hour can be interpreted as the time teachers spend in a telematic environment after their regular shift, engaging with students, responding to emails, interacting via WhatsApp, addressing inquiries, holding meetings with administrators and colleagues, and participating in forums, among other activities. Nevertheless, an expansion and acceleration of work-related activities emerging at the very core of the integration of mobile technological devices are observed.

We are reverting to a time when we worked more [...] technological issues, the platforms, create bureaucratic demands, extend working hours, and foster this sense of almost being shortchanged, of loss; it feels as though something is missing, though, strictly speaking, it isn't, since if we leave it for tomorrow, that's perfectly fine, too. I've told some of my colleagues: “Leave your bag in the car on Fridays, and pick it up again on Monday” [...] It's not merely a capture of working time; it involves a level of demand for instantaneity [...] it is the ‘vertigo of urgency’ (PHP).

The regulation of working hours, the “right to disconnect”, is something that teachers, in reality, do not possess. Why? Requests arrive systematically: inquiries, emails regarding schedule changes, meeting invitations, and various difficulties that crop up (PMP).

(...) This time spent on technology-mediated work—aside from being a novelty, presents another problem: it lacks rights and safeguards [...] This phenomenon became particularly acute during the pandemic [...] One would remain “plugged in” to the school environment twenty-four hours a day, and, obviously, the consequences of this are emotional in nature, impacting one's mental health (PMB).

The need for a break on weekends, highlighted by the interviewee, complements the professor's remarks, which emphasize workers' right to disconnect from work. In this regard,

mention must be made of the “Right to Disconnect from Work” law. Although neither Brazil nor Portugal currently possesses specific legislation on the matter, it constitutes a regulation governing the use of technological tools in the workplace, specifically, the right to rest, leisure, and breaks, achieved by limiting working hours, a boundary that had been eroded by the advent of new technologies (Bedin, 2018). Countries such as France and Italy have already duly regulated this right.

According to Souto Maior (2003), the “Right to Disconnect from Work” pertains to overtime hours, specifically those involving technological work performed as a matter of routine, a practice that adversely affects workers' health. According to this same author, rest periods and breaks constitute the very expression of the right to disconnect from work; consequently, this right is only duly fulfilled when there is a complete detachment from work-related duties. It is understood that the right to disconnect from work represents a new form of struggle, one that must be waged alongside the ongoing debate over the evolving configurations of the teaching workday and workers' health, with the aim of imposing limits on excessive labor.

Regarding teaching and the use of digital technologies, one must take into account technological ubiquity and hyperconnectivity during the workday. According to Souza et al. (2022), technological ubiquity can lead to an overload of tasks, as various resources encourage individuals to perform multiple activities within the same timeframe, fostering the false perception that time is being saved, even though health may be compromised due to the exhaustion induced by the simultaneous execution of tasks. Almeida (2017) asserts that workplace hyperconnection refers to a process of constant intercommunication that can pose various psychosocial risks to workers, such as a continuous state of alertness and anxiety, triggered by various parallel work activities (such as those enabled by mobile devices), thereby constituting a new form of labor flexibility. Indeed, digital work is characterized by significant flexibility, as it can be performed in any location, provided that a mobile device, such as a smartphone, and an internet connection are available (Previtali; Fagiani, 2023).

It is a paradox of our time that, even as we experience an intensification in the use of digital information and communication technologies, we also encounter instances of profound silencing in the workplace, as illustrated by the account of a teacher interviewed in Brazil, referring to the post-pandemic period: “There is a resounding silence in the school. This is something I have observed: falling ill in silence [...] people do not say that they are sick” (PMB).

Social relations have shifted; the embrace of the cyber world occurs with few criticisms or restrictions, yet with many doubts about its repercussions for health, given that these are not neutral work processes. Authors such as Bianchessi (2020) discuss the dependency generated by technological artifacts and problematize the term “nomophobia,” which refers to the fear of being cut off from mobile phone communication. According to Bianchessi (2020), this constitutes a form of technological dependency that takes shape at

the very core of new social relations. Transformations of both a subjective and social nature become evident in the wake of the digital revolution. Technological artifacts can, indeed, give rise to digital addiction, a concerning and growing problem. Bianchessi (2020) underscores the need to reflect on how these digital technologies are present in the daily school environment and how they are being utilized.

Burnout syndrome was described and standardized by the World Health Organization (WHO, 1998) during the final quarter of the 20th century, specifically, in the 1990s. It is a syndrome characterized by a metabolic and psychological response to high work demands, arising in environments characterized by excessive and prolonged workplace stress and tension. Even today, epidemiological studies reveal a high prevalence rate of burnout and common mental disorders among teachers (Campos; Veras; Araújo, 2020), reflecting situations of frustration, insecurity, overload, and stress within the broader context of workplace suffering (Hoffmann et al., 2019). This scenario calls for practical measures to address it, measures such as those facilitated by trade union initiatives, which lend visibility to the issue and bring the debate regarding work-related illness into the public sphere.

Existing studies point to a significant percentage of teachers suffering from mental health conditions, situations that involve the daily use of medication to enable them to remain alert and capable of working with students. The study conducted by Fenprof [National Federation of Teachers of Portugal] on burnout in the teaching profession, which addresses the multitude of issues involved, points precisely to this situation: a high rate of tranquilizer use among teachers. This is because their sleep becomes disrupted by constant stress and by the sheer volume of work, [...] they never end a day with all their tasks completed (PMP).

The aforementioned Fenprof study concerns the “National Survey on Living and Working Conditions in Education in Portugal,” the results of which were published in a special edition of Fenprof’s own journal (FENPROF, 2018), titled “Wear and Tear in the Teaching Profession: Burnout.” The data analysis report highlights the notion that burnout is a “consequence of a prolonged process involving a loss of meaning in one’s work” (p. 87). Furthermore, it is intimately linked to the transformation of work organization methods. In this context, fatigue and chronic stress evolve into a pathological condition, associated with a concerning level of medication use and with sleep disturbances, issues stemming from work that seriously interfere with memory and cognitive functions, which are vital to the teaching profession.

Consistent with these data, the study by Calainho, Cruz, and Cerdeira (2022) identifies “subjective exit” (depersonalization) as an escape route and a coping strategy for emotional exhaustion in the teaching profession. Along these lines, while burnout syndrome leads some to abandon the profession, others remain, yet perform work that falls far short of their potential, resulting in significant quality losses.

However, political resistance and the movement spearheaded by teachers’ unions are regarded as means of generating collective dissent against work-related illness.

Time of Resistance

Over the course of the dialogues with the interviewed trade unionists, a portion of the discussion was devoted to the theme of resistance to the “vertigo of urgency”, a sense of malaise among educators in the face of overwork and the intensified use of digital technologies. In this vein, prominence was given to both individual and collective strategies for countering labor intensification, specifically, the carving out of time for resistance and struggle in support of breaks and rest. Consequently, an interpretation emerged regarding “union time”: a time characterized by vertigo and “drama” in the face of the weakening of collective action and confrontation at the very core of the antagonistic class relations of our time.

The time for unions is precisely when they are needed most. The time for organizing is precisely when we most need to resist. Yet, a pervasive ideology circulates the notion that the era of unions has passed, that the time for resistance is over, period. [...] We also face a climate of fatigue and apprehension that inhibits confrontation, direct confrontation, taking to the streets, and making ourselves visible. And it is far easier to engage in spaces of resistance that, in their own way, serve that purpose, such as social media groups. (PMP)

There is this issue of collectivity, of human connection [...] of social relationships. A union cannot view itself as an island. It needs to engage in dialogue with society; it needs to build a campaign that extends beyond its own walls [...] one that prioritizes and values the workers, both men and women, within that institution. For if there is no such appreciation, no policy of valuing the staff, then there can be no quality education. (PMB)

I believe there is a certain drama unfolding here [...] it feels as though something is always missing, a sense of temporal vertigo, as if the time dedicated to one's craft, to reflection, or to reading were somehow unnecessary time. Therefore, I would suggest [...] that we make time to have coffee, and I mean *coffee*, not as a metaphor. (PHP)

The fragility of trade unions is a global reality, as they face, uninterruptedly, the impacts of productive restructuring and state reforms, often shifting from an offensive to a defensive stance. It is worth noting that, in various contexts, conservative waves are also on the rise; this demands multifaceted resistance from collective political actors to safeguard democracy, social and labor rights, and, among other actions, reduce working hours. It is undeniable that trade unions constitute important historical collectives that fight and resist for social justice (Lara; Silva, 2019).

Regarding the specific nature of teachers' unions, the study by Previtali and Fagiani (2023), conducted in Brazil and Portugal, highlights a distinctive characteristic of these unions: the indissociability between the struggle against the degradation of work and the defense of quality school education. The authors emphasize that new forms of struggle are being forged within the context of political-ideological disputes in schools, incorporating the use of new digital technologies.

An article by Fenprof (WEBSITE SPN, 2023b) regarding the situation of teachers in Portugal highlights the alarming shortage of teachers, the growing rate of attrition, and the

decline in the number of individuals aspiring to teach. The shortage of teachers has compelled many schools to further increase educators' teaching loads by assigning them additional duties—a situation that could worsen amid ongoing budgetary cuts stemming from neoliberal management prescriptions. Silver (2005) points out that teachers are often linked to the State and, as public servants, are subject to the direct consequences of recurring fiscal crises. Nevertheless, the author asserts that the education sector was one of the most active sectors in staging protests during the 20th century, surpassing, during certain periods, even the textile and automotive sectors.

An article published in the journal “The Lancet”, titled “Trade unions as actors in public health” (Wels, 2024) highlights the historical importance of trade unions as political actors in influencing workers' health. The author asserts that unions play a significant political role, not only regarding wages but also concerning the quality of life of the workforce. Wels (2024) further underscores the challenges posed by new configurations of work environments, which have consequences for workers' health, and notes a lack of new studies on this subject.

Finally, particular emphasis is placed on the excerpt alluding to interviewee PHP's “coffee metaphor”, serving as a symbol for fostering closeness between people, which aims to carve out time and create pauses for conversation and face-to-face interaction within relationships, thereby reviving traditional forms of human sociability. This appears to purposefully encapsulate the central drama of the “society of acceleration and fatigue” (Han, 2017). According to Kuenzer and Caldas (2009), the intensification of teaching work encroaches upon a professional's life to such an extent that they lack the time even to use the restroom or grab a cup of coffee. As the authors note, several factors drive this intensification, including low wages and holding concurrent positions at two or more schools. Indeed, intensification, overload, and the acceleration of work appear to constitute a universal agenda and a central concern within the ongoing struggle for better working conditions for teachers. Thus, this analytical section concludes by drawing upon the reflections of union representatives to envision a new configuration of “teacher resistance time”, a form of resistance that must be constructed, fundamentally, within the very fabric of their daily professional lives.

Antônio Nóvoa speaks to this point: the school should serve as a kind of counterweight to society. If society is accelerating, let us provide calm; if society fails to provide books, let us compel them to read. Fair enough, but society is currently gripped by the vertigo of clicks, likes, and endless feeds. Very well, then: within the school, let us restore calm; let us grant time. Let us devise tasks that encourage students to engage at a measured pace, with ample time at their disposal [...]. And I believe we would all stand to gain if we could succeed in making the school, as a counterpoint to this temporal vertigo, almost a “café school”... a school of the sidewalk terrace [...] (PHP).

According to Nóvoa (2020), the role of public schools as places of encounter among people must be enriched, serving as a counterpoint to a future increasingly marked by individualization, due, in part, to the systematic use of digital technologies featuring a strong

component of artificial intelligence. Consequently, teachers and their role as autonomous and independent professionals must be valued, standing in opposition to the prevailing ideology that they should unconditionally embrace digital content-based work and increased workloads. According to the author, these points will define the 21st century.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical parameters established by Marx (2013) in “Capital” served as the basis for the analysis of the categories constituted in this study, relating to physical, social, and moral limits, as originally postulated in the 19th century. Consequently, this study also contributes to updating the theoretical framework of historical materialism, particularly regarding the role of trade unions and workers' organizations in imposing political and social limits on the length of the working day.

The analysis undertaken by teachers' unions and groups composed predominantly of women has brought to light a myriad of overlapping challenges confronting educators in both Brazil and Portugal. Thus, the phrase “vertigo of urgency”, coined by an interviewed teacher, seems to capture the sense of living in a society where the acceleration of professional life fosters a new social temporality. Moreover, digital tools have adapted seamlessly to this new pace, catering to the “demand for instantaneity” and giving rise to the “technological hour”, additional expressions cited to describe the reality of work within schools. It is crucial to recognize that the neoliberal agenda is characterized by labor relations increasingly defined by precariousness, and by the fabrication of forms and methods of workplace pressure that blur the boundaries between work time and personal time. Against this backdrop, teachers and their unions engage daily in acts of resistance and political struggle; for, notwithstanding the relative fragility of labor movements in the current international context, they remain vital collective bodies fighting against the degradation of the teaching profession and advocating for quality education.

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Submitted on: 04/14/2025

Preprint: 09/26/2024

Aprovado: 01/05/2026

Section Editor: Stefannie Ibraim

DECLARATION OF DATA AVAILABILITY

The data will be available upon request from the reviewers.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 – Project coordination, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript writing.

Author 2 – Data analysis, manuscript writing, and final manuscript revision.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding this article.