

## REVIEW

## THE CURRENT NAME OF TEACHER'S DISCONTENTS

PEREIRA, M.R. (2016). **O nome atual do mal-estar docente.** Belo Horizonte: Fino Traço, 2016.

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The changes introduced into our modern, postmodern, “hypermodern” or liquid society, as some contemporary psychoanalysts and sociologists prefer to call, have been producing new forms of subjectification and also discontent. These facts, associated to the process of democratization of education throughout the twentieth century, have brought some implications to the field of education, whose effects can be observed in relational and subjective aspects of the teaching profession.

Freud (1930), in his classic text *Civilization and its discontents*, had already warned us that one of our sources of human suffering comes from our intersubjective relationships, considering it much more painful when comparing our body's decay before the passage of time and the influence of the external world that we have no control of. Against the forms of suffering, arising from human relationships, Freud mentioned that the most immediate defense is involuntary isolation, that is, to distance oneself from people.

At present, we observe a pertinent finding, which is in line with Freud's perspective: due to confrontations with the students and the numerous difficulties experienced in the classroom, many teachers have been granted medical leave and others have been away from their work activities of schools.

Current research points to and denounces the new directions and challenges for those engaged in the task of educating, said to be impossible, taking into account the Freudian premise. It sounds as a lack of hope, which discourages a significant portion of teachers,

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who sometimes say they feel bewildered.

These and other verifications show that there are old dilemmas that accompany and prowl the intra and extra school walls. However, we perceive new arrangements and problems that collaborate indirectly with what we call the psychic suffering of teachers. It can be observed that, from basic education to higher education, studies tend to point to a certain decline and emptying of that “robust” and consistent imago of the teacher who loses his social legitimacy. Morais (2011) is decisive in this analysis of education to the point of affirming that we are in a trap of radical contemporaneity that infiltrates in the new generations, in a subliminal way, a disregard for human historicity.

Pereira (2016), in identifying these changes that directly and indirectly affect the school and the teacher, notes that there also resides a singularity, a particular, not an universal way, with which each teacher responds to these demands within a context of psychic, social and historical vulnerability. This is one of the motivations for which the author presents us with his seminal book – *The current name of teacher's discontents*.

At the heart of his research, Pereira analyzes the loss of teacher's authority and what is at stake, from school to university, in the form of psychic ailments, which sometimes make teachers suffer, sometimes make them prisoners or lead them to identify with their own suffering. The author concentrates his study on the specificity of teachers of adolescents, for particular reasons, since the confrontations with them have been identified as triggers of processes of psychic morbidities of the teachers, although it should not be conceived of a binary form, that is to say, following the logic of cause and effect.

In this work, it is problematized what leads the teachers to a certain feeling of inferiority of their work, and, consequently, its effects on the mental health that has generated an “abusive” use of psychotropic drugs. Therefore, these impasses in the teacher's office have led to an experience of suffering that, among many terms, the author calls “teacher's discontents”, parallel to depression. The latter is treated as the current name of the symptom, a singular way in which the teacher reveals that something is wrong with his/her desire. Therefore, it is a way of dealing with the real.

Thus, Pereira invites us to a contemporary debate about depression that involves teachers, without losing sight of the essence of psychoanalytic hermeneutics and its return to Freud. Depression, although it seems so familiar, has been widely diffused as the evil of the twenty-first century, or, in Lacan's words, “the great contemporary neurosis.” A careful reading of Pereira's book led me to questioning:

can it be anticipated that it is because of this “evil” (depression) that teachers also suffer? The nosography of depression does not convince the author, because this diagnosis, on the other hand, has an adhesive, a glue effect, produces a certain adherence of the subject to this signifier that paralyzes the action and, in turn, takes him/her to a position of enjoyment. In this aspect, the psychoactive drugs can produce relief of symptoms, help to sedate the anguish, produce a self-appeasing effect, as they lead the subject to a crystallized adherence to his/her symptom, that is, glued to the feeling of impotence. In this sense, the author seeks, through the discourses of the teachers interviewed, to make them falter from this static place. In order to do so, he provokes them to de-substantiate themselves. He establishes, formalizes, creates spaces of speech for these teachers so that they move away from these fixed subjective identifications and, as a result of this speech and listening, find new solutions against what makes them suffer and retreat before the real.

The author’s choice of “teacher’s discontents” to the detriment of others, such as “occupational stress”, “emotional exhaustion”, “depression”, “frustration” or “depersonalization”, seems to be bargaining for his field of research – psychoanalysis – highlighting the nature of the symptom and anguish that teachers of adolescents face in their profession.

In that direction, the symptom will not be treated as it does in the medical order. It is interesting for the author to “analyze” the symptom from a skewed form of realization of desire, that is, he rescues Freud’s methodology when he listened to the hysterical ones and questioned himself about the effect of the secondary gain of the “illness” inscribed in a symbolic form. As a kind of “hieroglyph” that demanded of the analyst a “translation” before the suffering of the patient. In this way, the symptom is, for the subject, that thing that is not well, since it causes him/her suffering; but also, what fits him/her well, since he/she begins to enjoy and establishes himself/herself as the symptom. The teacher complains, but does not abandon his/her cause.

Addressing the problem of teacher’s discontents, today, requires an effort of analysis from multiple perspectives. It is necessary to identify the mechanisms at issue, the classifications that subject the teacher to diagnoses that, to some extent, confirm the feeling of impotence when they are removed from their work activities for clinical reasons. Thus, imbued with this need for verification, Pereira made an effort to bring together variables, studies and knowledge from various fields of knowledge, always criticizing the epidemiological results in an attempt to understand the complexity involved in the

psychic suffering of teachers.

The author immerses himself in Sociological studies and transits between works of foreign theorists to indicate that his object of investigation has been an old agenda in the studies. However, it is necessary to show, unveil the clothing with which the new symptoms are worn. Therefore, the author announces what would be at stake in the current social bond that would lead teachers to psychic illness. There are three hypotheses related to the condition of the teacher, that the anguish of the teachers would be bound to: first, to the decline of the contemporary social bond, at least a kind of tie based on the traditions; second, to the teacher's reduced ability to cope with the complexity of new social relationships; and finally, the embryonic hypothesis of his thesis, the teachers' ailments – their clinical symptoms – may be ways of resistance that would (or would not) contradict history, that is, the teacher gives in to his/her desire, he/she evades before the demand of the social other. These three hypotheses are aligned with a close relationship of teachers of adolescents, who express in the classroom disturbing behaviors and conflicts derived from this relationship.

The bibliographical, introductory, study, proposed by Pereira, assertively takes to pieces the researches in Latin America, North America, Europe and Oceania. It endorses a set of factors involved in teacher's discontents, such as: school violence, physical illness, mental disorders, increased workload, rigid hierarchical assessment, shorter and shorter time frames to respond to school demands, and bullying. It is considered a body of elements that exert direct and indirect influence in this plot of the psychic suffering of the teacher. Nevertheless, the author is not limited to establishing a causal link, as quantitative researches do, and suspends the results of these researches, although consistent from the point of view of the number of the sample. This retreat of the author seems to be an attempt to answer his first inquiry, whose quantitative studies seem to point out: do those who teach suffer more? It is a dimension of this suffering that is being highlighted through the statements of the teachers who claim to be in that condition.

In Pereira's view, these investigations have presented limitations, both those of quantitative and qualitative approach. While the first, on the one hand, looks for objectivity, that is, to find meaning in numbers, seeking to generalize results directly; on the other hand, it excludes what would be substantial to make considerations about subjectivity. In this aspect, the subject in its singularity, its ambivalences, uncertainties, irruptions, drives, incongruities, in its fundamental division between

the social and itself, disappears in these models of investigation stated as objectives. In quantitative research, the numbers “speak” on the one hand; however, on the other hand, fail to enunciate and even reveal subjective dimensions of the subjects of the investigation. It is much more about the plural than about the singularities.

The second approach, in turn, uses a small number of samples and conventional methodological strategies, such as: case study, semi-structured interviews, focus group, and conversation, among others. However, it also terminates not acquiring wide reach and it loses its breath, being restricted to the initial publications in the context of Brazil and, timidly, in Latin America. However, the qualitative approaches enable the subject to speak about himself/herself and bring to the center of the analysis the narratives that condense the dimension of the particular and the singularity.

This mordent criticism woven by Pereira does not come without solid arguments. The author invites the reader to venture into a new perspective of reading and comprehension about these teacher’s discontents from the method of clinical orientation. Instead of formulating hypotheses about the mental condition of teachers in general, the author seeks to study, in certain teachers who suffer, the specific incidence of the profession in their own subjective sufferings.

In this direction, Pereira uses, as a compass, the method of clinical orientation, from the research-intervention of clinical orientation, based on the fundamentals of Psychoanalysis applied to research. He examines documents, official records, creates alternatives that make it possible to interview teachers who claim to suffer psychically in Belo Horizonte. This character of intervention, and not only of reporting, reveals a clinical aspect that should be safeguarded. Psychoanalysis, in this sense, helps to arouse suspicion concerning any generalist conception of discourse, which, with its methods, systems and games of force, can neglect the place of microphysical, singular and capillary experiences, the author points out. He also complements that the clinical method suffers harsh criticism and mentions those authors who refute such an approach.

It is praiseworthy to announce, with solid arguments, the criticisms of which the method of clinical orientation is also subjected in its evaluation. For this reason, Pereira takes off from a narcissistic position in which more orthodox psychoanalysts are based and, bluntly, recognizes the limits of time and full scope of the method from which he appropriates, since he is not in a conventional psychoanalytic clinic. He expends efforts to produce impact and

some changes from a psychoanalysis applied to the symptom.

The author reiterates that the principles, techniques and other methodological regulations developed from his theoretical foundation seek a political-academic aim of helping the psychoanalytic debate to become inserted in the core of research dominated, mainly, by the social sciences. In addition, it intends to show the effectiveness and the need to discuss the discursive singularities or the manners of subjectivation in the culture.

In this sense, the psychoanalysis the author “militates” for must be disentangled, uninhibited and widely experienced, thus avoiding group effects and doctrinal hermetic, as do those who are isolated in the conventional institutions of formation of analysts. A psychoanalysis that confronts other knowledge, other practices and that is taken to the city and the social converges with the thought of Pereira. According to the author, it is a possible transforming action of the subjective reality, besides just understanding it, since it emphasizes an intervention from singular and micropolitical orders in the social experience. In creating frank speech spaces, the research proposal has a dual function: research, as we have traditionally conceived it; and of intervention by the one who conducts it or by those who compose the universe of participating subjects.

From these speech spaces, taking into account the fundamental rule of free association, and based on transference and the notion of the unconscious, whether in collective conversational sessions or in individual clinical orientation sessions, it is offered to the teacher the opportunity so that he/she elaborates and constructs new meanings or new signifiers for his/her subjective experiences. The subject is led to speak, so that his/her memory takes place in the form of repetition, so that he/she reflects on his/her practice, formalizes his/her impasses to detach himself/herself from the identifications and constructs exits. It is a clinical-reflexive direction, in the social sense of Psychoanalysis, not in the therapeutic sense, emphasizes the author. In this sense, research in psychoanalysis can be a specific office, not a profession, or a specialty; an ethic and not a moral one.

Considering the ethics of psychoanalysis, Pereira gives rise to suspicion of the hypothesis that the psychic suffering of teachers involves a game in which the competence of the teacher himself/herself has been placed as a cause. Faced with demands, confrontations, abandonments, external judgments, teachers are reduced to feelings of failure, guilt, and impotence, constituting a proof against their narcissism. In this sense, these mentioned difficulties can make the teacher vulnerable. This means that the teacher will tend to live failure

as his/her very own experience, discarding from his/her critical analysis the multiple-dimensional labor contingencies in which he/she circumscribes his/her discontents. It is in this context that Pereira intensifies his critique and emphasizes the fact that this vulnerability should not be reduced to the subject, because it is also linked to his/her condition of historical, social and psychic vulnerability.

From the listening to the discursive singularities, following the Freudian maxim - from case to case to extract an “analysis” -, Pereira establishes the device of a clinic applied to the symptom and offers the word to ten teachers (Bela, Dora, Felipa, Magali, Monica, Norberto, Tânia, Tiago, Wellington and Zara), among the fifty who were interviewed. He describes in a substantial way the cases considered most emblematic and consistent from the clinical point of view. He seeks, in the regularities of these discourses, to demarcate the symptoms of each teacher before the office of teaching. The narratives project what exists of more singular with the symptoms of each one. When reading some narratives, the reader will see that the author has minutely analyzed the idiosyncrasies of each subject and, when possible, revealed the surprise effect produced by the method of clinical orientation.

These case studies are clarifying and make it possible to understand, with reading, some nuances about these symptoms: school as a locus where complaints are inscribed; the school as an index of the repetition with which the teachers find themselves on a stage crossed by the excess of the imaginary, since they act and enjoy, and the symptom is sometimes named as depression, leading them to a feeling of impotence and utopia; and, finally, many teachers were attached, adhered to the biomedical categories that helped some of them obtain medical leave or others leaves of absence.

In this context, the school seems to equate a set of frustrations and experiences related to the life histories of each teacher. Some teachers, despite suffering, remain in school. This is an issue that comes from listening to teachers. For the author, the teachers who remain in school seem to fulfill a neurotic function of pointing the hole of the social other (the school, the managers, the system etc.) and to become victims, keeping a pact with the symptom. In that direction, the depressive state in which they find themselves, would not only be a form of suffering, but joy. The disease emerges as a refuge against the voracity of the other that demands action. Locked in the biomedical discourse and fixed in their diagnoses, they find “relief” in psychoactive drugs, which, on the one hand, attenuates their anguish and, on the other, impoverish life and anesthetize moral courage.

Pereira’s research-intervention helps us critically analyze the



subjective position that the teacher has taken in front of less repressed young people, which generate embarrassment difficult for the teacher to overcome. The teacher, faced with this reality, has found, in the “escape to the disease”, an artifice or refuge to deal with his/her impotence and subjective resignation in the face of these pedagogical avatars, confrontations and lack of interest of the students. The author also denounces that the school, in turn, has not helped teachers to elaborate and to unlock the symptoms that paralyze them. On the contrary, following the design of “pedagogical motherhood”, which tends to mother subjects and school procedures to the point of protect everyone and everything, the school may be covering the faults of its members, in this case, teachers, infusing them with more bureaucracies than attitudes. It is in this direction that some strategies are presented by the author, with a view to dealing with these impasses experienced by teachers. First, recover his/her moral courage to act in situations of uncertainties and discontinuities; second, to help the teacher to respond more or less quickly to the apathy of the students, without becoming equally apathetic; and, finally, to understand the forms of “civilization and its discontents” that continue to plague the pedagogical world.

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**Submission:** 17/03/2017

**Approbation:** 23/04/2018

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