ARTIGOS

When teachers drop out: a study on resignation in the state public school system in São Paulo [1] [2] [3]

Quando os professores desistem: um estudo sobre a exoneração na rede pública estadual de ensino de São Paulo

Cuando los profesores renuncian al trabajo: un estudio sobre el sistema escolar público en estado de São Paulo

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Abstract

This article analyzes the teacher resignation process and its relationship with working conditions of the São Paulo state education network. The discussion is based on a bibliographic research about the topic and on a statistical analysis of data from 2012 to 2018, as well as on information from semi-structured interviews with teachers from the education network. The data show high and constant rates of resignation in that period and highline that the resignation can be considered the final moment of a resignation process strongly influenced by dissatisfaction with working conditions, especially with career, salary, working hours and the organization and structure of the São Paulo state education network.

Keywords: teaching exoneration, teaching abandonment, teaching working conditions, teaching valorization, São Paulo state education network

Resumo

Este artigo analisa o fenômeno da exoneração de docentes e sua relação com as condições de trabalho na rede estadual paulista de ensino. A discussão parte de levantamento bibliográfico acerca da temática, de dados estatísticos sobre a exoneração no período de 2012 a 2018 e de informações coletadas por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas realizadas com professores da rede. Os dados analisados mostraram elevados e constantes índices de exoneração no período e evidenciaram que este é o momento final de um processo de desistência influenciado fortemente pela insatisfação diante das condições de trabalho, sobretudo da carreira, dos salários, da jornada de trabalho, e da organização e estrutura da rede paulista.

Palavras-chave: *exoneração docente, abandono do magistério, condições de trabalho docente, valorização do magistério, rede pública de ensino paulista*

Resumen

Este artículo analiza el fenómeno de la renuncia de profesores y su relación con las condiciones laborales en el sistema escolar del estado de São Paulo. La discusión se basa en una revisión bibliográfica sobre el tema, en datos estadísticos sobre el período de abandono entre 2012 a 2018 y información obtenida a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los datos analizados mostraron altas y constantes tasas de abandono en el período y mostraron que la renuncia es el momento final de un proceso fuertemente influenciado por la insatisfacción con las condiciones laborales, especialmente carrera, salarios, jornada laboral, organización y estructura de la red pública de São Paulo.

Palabras claves: *renuncia docente, abandono del magisterio, condiciones del trabajo docente, valorización professional, enseñanza pública*

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21ˢᵗ century, the Ministry of Education (MEC) issued a warning about the drop in demand for degree courses and a possible risk of lacking teachers, especially in high school (Ruiz et al., 2007). Some actions were officially proposed to face this situation, such as the National Teacher Training Policy, aiming to expand the offer and improve the quality of teacher training courses. Among the programs and projects related to the National Policy were those aimed at bringing Basic Education and the University closer together, as was the case with the Institutional Program of Initiation to Teaching Scholarships (Pibid). While actions related to teacher training are essential to combat the phenomenon of teacher shortages, with which the MEC expressed concern, they alone are not enough to solve it since as important as investment in training is to ensure the effective permanence of teachers in schools, especially in public networks. In this sense, we must consider two essential aspects: the need to hold public hiring processes for entry and tenure in the teaching career and the provision of adequate working conditions for teachers to extend their permanence in the profession and reduce job abandonment. In this article, we will address this second aspect, dealing more specifically with the phenomenon of teacher resignations[4] and their relationship with working conditions in the São Paulo state public network.

Data from the Department of Education of the State of São Paulo (Seduc) regarding teacher resignation are alarming. In 2018, an average of eight tenured teachers gave up teaching on the network per day, according to data received via the Citizen Information System (SIC)[5]. Considering it to be a stable position, resulting from approval for tenured positions, which, in a scenario of political and economic instability, would allow for certain professional safety, what called our attention was that many teachers chose to give up their position, requesting their resignation. Analyzing this phenomenon, concerning its scope and causes, is important to raise the public debate on the shortage of teachers that also affects the São Paulo teaching network, the largest in the country. Research data from Barbosa et al. (2020) pointed to a reduction of more than 60,000 teachers in this network from 2014. While this reduction is caused by several factors, such as the drop in the number of enrollments and

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[4] Resignation is the voluntary abandonment, for personal interest, from the public administration to which the public servant was linked after approval for entry into a tenured position.

[5] SIC-SP Protocol No. 596201812638, SIC-SP Protocol No. 62068194815.

decreased number of non-tenured teachers, resignations are pointed out as a fundamental cause of the reduction among tenured teachers.

Furthermore, it is worth considering that frequent requests for resignation lead to increased teacher turnover in schools, which according to Lourencetti (2008) and Barbosa (2011), has negative implications for teaching work. Cunha (2019) states that turnover creates problems for the pedagogical organization of schools, making it difficult to properly plan activities and consolidate collective work, with consequences for the teaching and learning process.

Despite the importance of the theme, academic productions on the phenomenon of the resignation of teachers are not quantitatively expressive, especially in the São Paulo network. A bibliographical survey identified that in the last ten years, few studies directly or indirectly addressed the theme, highlighting the contributions of studies carried out by Caldas (2007), Parparelli (2009), Barbosa (2011), Malta (2014), and Botelho (2015). The concern with resignation in Latin America, specifically of teachers at the beginning of their careers, was the subject of an investigation carried out by Chilean researchers, demonstrating that the phenomenon is not exclusive to our country (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020). It is notorious that academic productions on resignation, even internationally, resort to research by Lapo (1999) and Lapo and Bueno (2003), carried out in Brazil in previous decades, as a prominent reference. In this way, there is a gap in recent academic production regarding the analysis of teachers' resignations, especially if we consider their relationship with teaching working conditions.

With this gap in mind, this article is dedicated to analyzing the phenomenon of resignation, in terms of its scope and relationship with working conditions, to understand how the scene is set up in the São Paulo network, expanding the understanding of the reasons that lead teachers requesting resignation from their post. The analyzed data were obtained through research that, in addition to the bibliographical review on the subject, resorted to the survey of statistical information obtained via SIC and to semi-structured interviews carried out with Teachers of Basic Education II (PEB II)[6]. Resignation data refer exclusively to tenured

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[6] The research was evaluated and approved by the Ethics Committee of the School of Sciences and Letters – UNESP – Araraquara Campus (Opinion 2,504,336; CAAE 82095918.0.0000.5400).

teachers, i.e., those who assume a public position regulated by law after approval in a public hiring process.

This article is organized into three parts, in addition to this introduction and the final considerations. The first addresses the phenomenon of resignation in the São Paulo state network; the second discusses the relationship between resignation and working conditions, considering mainly career, wages, working hours, organization, and structure of the São Paulo network; and, finally, the strategies that usually precede resignation are discussed.

The phenomenon of resignation in the State of São Paulo in recent years

Resignation is well known in the reality of public schools in São Paulo since several teachers voluntarily ask for permanent resignation from the position to which they were linked. Other analogous terms are used in different realities close to resignation: teaching abandonment, teaching desertion, teacher abandonment, and teacher evasion (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020), mobilizing researchers for their understanding. In this research, we used teaching resignation because it is the official name given to the resignation request and because not every resignation means teaching abandonment since many teachers leave their work in the state network but continue teaching in other public or private schools. Resignation is the climax of a process that involves leaves of varying duration from a few days, as is the case of absenteeism characterized by paid absences, justified and unjustified, to leaves of a more extended period that occur with leaves and partial leaves and without remuneration of the teaching network, until the removal request for other schools of the same network.

The existence of frequent resignations in the state education network is not a new fact, but the current organization and conditions of the schools have likely led to its aggravation. In a survey carried out in the 1990s, Lapo and Bueno (2003) identified an increase of around 300% in requests to withdraw from teaching positions. It is worth mentioning that the study was carried out in a scenario where there was a voluntary resignation plan[7] aimed at the state

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[7] The Voluntary Resignation Program (PDV) of the state government of São Paulo was created in 1996 as part of the State Reform and offered the possibility of incentivized resignation to around 310,000 employees from all public sectors, intending to reduce a few percentage points on the monthly payroll.

civil service, which may have had implications for the increase in resignation cases. Currently, therefore, other reasons lead to resignation in the network.

In an attempt to understand the phenomenon of resignation of teachers in the São Paulo state public network in a more recent period, we collected data by year from Seduc, via SIC, from 2012 to 2018. The time frame considered 2012, the beginning of the series, the timepoint that preceded the last public hiring processes for teachers in the state network, 2013 for PEB II, and 2014 for PEB I, since the final year corresponded to the last complete period of data made available by Seduc before the completion of the research. In the period, we evidenced a total of 20,081 resignations of tenured teachers, accounting for a significant average of eight resignations per day. Considering that the data refer only to tenured teachers, it is worth noting the numbers concerning the number of the analyzed period:

Table 1

Tenured teachers and resignations by year (2012 to 2018)

Year	Tenured teachers	Resignations
2012	117,623	2,969
2013	116,122	2,788
2014	138,708	3,111
2015	129,185	2,840
2016	124,202	2,610
2017	123,508	2,659
2018	121,524	3,104

Source: Own elaboration based on data obtained from the General Coordination of Human Resources (CGRH) and data provided by Seduc via SIC (SIC-SP Protocols No. 596201812638 and 62068194815)
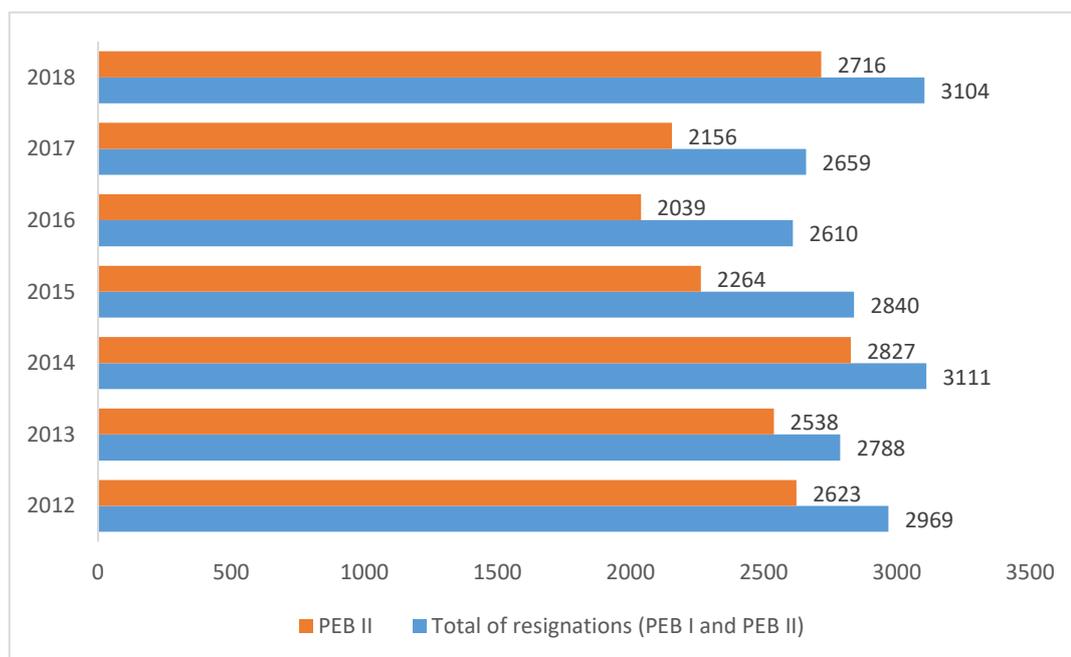
We observed that the number of resignations of tenured teachers in the network remained at around 3 thousand requests/year during the analyzed period, with higher indications in 2014 and 2018. This data becomes even more significant if we consider that during this period, only two public hiring processes were held in the network: one in 2013 for the position of PEB II and one in 2014 for PEB I. This explains the increase in tenured teachers in 2014, shown in Table 1, and the increased resignation request. Despite this, it is noteworthy how the number of staff drops rapidly in the following years. Although the reduction in the number of tenured teachers does not have resignation as the only cause (retirements, for example, would also help to understand this reduction), the constancy of requests for resignation represents a considerable reduction of 20,081 teachers in the period from 2012 to 2018, thus becoming an essential element to understand the decrease in the

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number of tenured teachers. Although hiring was relatively numerous after the public hiring processes mentioned above, they were not enough to replace the number of teachers who left the teaching profession in São Paulo every year since the number of tenured teachers in 2018 remained very close to that of 2012, the first in the series.

Considering exclusively the data referring to PEB II, we observed that most of the requests for resignation from the position came from teachers of this class: on average, 80% of them.

Chart 1

Total number of resignations (PEB I and PEB II) and number of PEB II resignations per year (2012 to 2018)

Source: Own elaboration based on data provided by Seduc via SIC (SIC-SP Protocols No. 596201812638 and 62068194815)

Regarding these resignation data, we emphasize that they reflect the composition of the teaching category in the network since in 2012, there were 63,039 teachers responsible for the initial years and 169,689 for PEB II, while in 2018, 40,867 were PEB I and 149,529 were PEB II (considering tenured and non-tenured).

Due to the seriousness evidenced by the statistical data referring to the resignation of teachers in the São Paulo state public network, especially among the PEB II, it is necessary to

problematize the phenomenon taking into account its causes, intending to broaden the understanding of the relationship between this and work conditions of works. We resorted to other works that approach the theme to analyze this relationship. We found no other research that addressed resignations in the referred network in a recent period, especially considering what teachers say about it. Therefore, we conducted semi-structured interviews with four teachers from the final years of elementary school and high school (PEB II) – with the most significant number of resignations – who left their tenured position during the ten years before the research. Among those interviewed, we sought to include teachers from the four major areas of the curriculum components: Human Sciences, Languages and Codes, Natural Sciences, and Mathematics. Furthermore, they had been assigned to different Boards of Education in the interior of São Paulo at the time of resignation. Respondents will be identified here as P1, P2, P3, and P4.

We sought to understand the reasons that led teachers to join teaching work in this network to discuss why they left teaching in the São Paulo network. When asked about entering a public career, the teachers pointed out the issue of stability resulting from the public hiring process as an essential aspect of teaching work. Three of the four teachers already experienced the reality of the public school before becoming tenured under the condition of eventual replacing daily absences and/or leaves and removals, situations in which they coexisted with significant instability and professional precariousness. The possibility of job stability, even considering the risks of a probationary period, was seen as an initial attraction to become tenured teachers:

> *From 2002 to 2004, I only taught classes on, let's say, absence, leave, or classes like that when I was very lucky to show up, and during the year, I managed to take them throughout the whole year and the following year I had no guarantee about any of these classes. So the public hiring process thing, I thought about doing it; I prepared myself to do it thinking about having a good time, passing a good placement, taking my own classes, a minimal amount, but which was always guaranteed, and being able to choose the place at least reasonable to work* (P2).

> *Well, at first, for a new field of work and also for the illusion we usually have of stability, about a job* (P4).

> *At the time, believing that it was possible to develop an educational work still in the model of public education and for the opportunity, beginning of a career, you know, we see initially as a great desire to conciliate a public office, to become a tenured public servant* (P3).

The cited excerpts show the effective entry into the public teaching career as a way to get a stable job, but also express the ideal of contributing to public education. However, in the last two highlighted excerpts, the fact that these initial expectations were thwarted throughout the work process drew our attention: '*the illusion we usually have of stability*' (P4) e '*the beginning of a career, you know*?' (P3).

Therefore, we seek to understand what happened so that the initial expectations of these teachers when they entered teaching in São Paulo were frustrated along their trajectory. Some aspects of teaching work mentioned by interviewees and addressed by other authors signaled the relationship between working conditions and dissatisfaction with teaching, contributing to a process that triggered the resignation.

Resignations and teaching working conditions

Teaching working conditions correspond to the resources that enable work activities in education networks and systems. According to Oliveira and Assunção (2010), they refer, in general, to the set of resources that make work possible, such as physical facilities, available materials, equipment and means of carrying out activities and employment relationships, forms of hiring, remuneration, career, and stability. The analysis of working conditions must be situated in time and space, i.e., in the historical, social, and economic context that engenders them and that interferes with the nature of work itself, which implies considering that they are the result of a given social organization defined in its economic bases by the capitalist mode of production and its contradictions (Oliveira, 2004). In this sense, in recent years, in the state network of São Paulo, under the domain of New Public Management, Barbosa et al. (2020, p. 808) stated that 'teachers are working more, both in the classroom and outside of it, with lower wages and in more fragile conditions given the complex demands of their professional performance.'

While it encompasses a series of constituent aspects of teaching working conditions, the research data revealed a very close relationship between the phenomenon of teacher resignation and career and wages, working hours, and the organization and structure of schools, which we will explore below.

Despite the empirical data on the motivation for individuals to enter the São Paulo teaching profession having indicated stability in the public service as an important factor, when asked about the attractiveness of the career plan, it was noticeable that this factor does not guarantee the permanence of teachers in the network, given the difficulties in career progression. The following quote illustrates this situation well:

> The new teacher spends a lot of time and wears himself out to get to a point where the salary compensates [these conditions]. What he will go through to get to that point is not worth it. At least most of the teachers I know who started with me, either a little earlier or a little later, ended up giving up because they didn't see an advantage in waiting (P4).

The interviewees' statements support the results of the research by Barbosa et al. (2020), which highlighted that although the teaching career in the São Paulo public network is formed by a structure of eight ranges and eight levels, the most advanced stage that a teacher had reached by the end of 2018 was Range 4, level VII, and almost half of the active teachers (42%) were in the first stage of their career (Range 1, level I) which was equivalent to a salary of BRL 2,233.02 for PEB I and BRL 2,585.01 for PEB II, considering a 40-hour work week. Therefore, it is evident that P4 is correct when he says that the new teacher would take a long time to reach better remuneration since career progression is complex. Also, the expected salaries for the initial ranges are meager.

Similarly, P1 indicated that teachers who remain in teaching are those who have already reached more advanced stages in their careers and who, therefore, are entitled to higher salaries, even if, in general, they are admittedly lower than those paid to professionals with the same training:

> The vast majority of teachers who have been there for a reasonable amount of time have already reached the five-year wage increase, proof of merit. I understand that they are staying because of other benefits like stability and employment, so they are not willing to resign and are getting by, but they say exactly that 'we're getting by' (P1).

Again, the teacher's interview reinforces the research findings of Barbosa et al. (2020), who, when analyzing the number of five-year wage increases in São Paulo, found that 62% of teachers have worked for up to two five-year wage increases, with 32% have not yet completed the first five-year period, i.e., they are teachers who have been teaching for less than five years in the network. These authors point out that:

The required requirements make this progression difficult, as most teachers are at the initial levels of their careers. Added to this is that initial salaries are meager, especially when compared to what determines the PSPN law, the minimum wage calculated by Dieese, and the earnings of other professions for which higher education is required. All these conditions have contributed to the devaluation of teachers and made it difficult for them to remain in the public network, expressed in the increase in the number of resignations of tenured teachers and also in the significant number of teachers with a few five-year wage increases (Barbosa et al., 2020, p. 809).

Thus, salaries are related to the resignation of teachers, and the respondents' responses unanimously pointed to the low remuneration of state teachers compared to other professions that require the same degree of qualification and, even more seriously, indicated that this was a decisive reason for disconnection from the public network. P2 showed frustration with the salary when reporting that issues, such as having his own house, are unfeasible with the wages received by many of the teachers:

Everyone who works and, mainly, who studied to work, graduated, went to college, and continues to graduate, specializing, improving, wants to earn well, wants to succeed financially, wants to be able to have a house, have a car, maintain a family, everything that depends on money. With the teacher's salary from the State, you can't do that (P2).

P1, on the other hand, established a close relationship between appreciation and remuneration in the decision to resign the position:

The difficulty of the work was the lack of appreciation; I didn't feel valued as a professional, so that was also a lack of motivation. I'm going to talk about salary, yes, because it was also something that demotivated me immensely. Why would I strive to be the greatest professional in the world if I don't get paid for it? Sometimes, you know, I spend three or four hours a day that I could be doing anything else … to work for a State that doesn't even pay me a living wage? (P1).

In this sense, salary devaluation and the difficulty in moving up the career ladder can be conceived as one of the leading causes of dissatisfaction and abandonment of teaching, making it difficult to attract new generations to teaching and retain professionals in the public network.

Concerning the working hours, Barbosa et al. (2021) point out that increased working hours have been increasingly common among public school teachers in São Paulo, even as a strategy to increase income, given the situation of wage devaluation. We should also consider that, in addition to the hours worked in the classroom, the teachers work extra hours which,

although not very visible, unmeasured and unpaid, are essential for the satisfactory development of teaching activities.

Among the subjects interviewed, two of them had a very long workday, as can be seen in Table 2. Even those with shorter workloads were subject to an intense routine of commuting between different workplaces, which put them in an exhausting condition of itinerancy between different schools in other municipalities:

Table 2

Workload of the interviewed subject

	Total hours/class considering public and private networks	*Average number of students per class at Seduc*	*Itinerância*
P1	30 classes	42 students per room.	1 school in the state network (city A). 2 schools in the private network(city B).
P2	36 classes	30 students per room.	1 school in the state network (city A). 1 school in the private network(city B).
P3	60 classes	1st school: 25 students per room. 2nd school8: 42 students per room.	1 school in the state network (city A). 2 schools in the private network(city B and city C).
P4	52 classes	45 students per room.	1 school in the state network (city A). 1 school in the private network(city B).

Table 2 shows that all teachers also worked in private schools, in the same city they lived in or in another. This further aggravated the itinerancy situation over the days of the week and increased the travel time between different schools. The period destined for commuting is a factor that impacts work, as in addition to being unpaid, it occupies part of the teacher's day, spending time and energy. Furthermore, three of the four teachers interviewed could not become tenured in the cities where they lived. Therefore, they taught nearby,

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8 P3 requested transference from the position to another unit during his career in the state network. Thus, the school is identified as 1st and 2nd schools.

moving to work in different municipalities. These teachers highlighted the discomfort caused by this condition since constant travel, even short trips, aggravated physical exhaustion and subjected them to more significant risks. The excerpts from P3 and P4's speeches illustrate the teachers' intense work routine:

> The most intense year… was precisely the year of resignation. Living in⁹ x, I worked at a school in y, a private school, so I had to travel from x to y, more or less one hundred and twenty, one hundred and thirty km. I worked there for two days, taught for fifteen hours. Then I went back to x, taught at another private school in x, five hours of class, then I would return in the morning to y. In the afternoon, I would teach in x; at the end of the afternoon, I would leave x and go to z to work there. I would leave at eleven o'clock at night and arrive home at midnight, half past midnight. I slept, and the next day at six o'clock in the morning, I was going back to z to make a six-hour journey, returning to x and to the private schools in x. This went on all week, I didn't work on Saturdays or Sundays, but this commuting ratio was very large and intense... (P3).

> There were days when I taught twice in x, I taught in the morning and the evening, and in the afternoon, I taught in y. So I would leave y in the morning, go to x, go back to y, go to x, and then go back to y again at night. I spent an average of an hour and a half, two hours, on those days just commuting (P4).

All teachers interviewed taught in more than one city at the time of resignation. Often, the PEB II teacher, who works in specific disciplines of the curriculum, teaches in more than one school or teaching network and, possibly, in more than one city since the workload of this teacher is fractioned and, in many cases, it is challenging to complete the working hours in only one school unit. According to Duarte (2010), expanding the individual workday due to the teacher taking on more than one job in different establishments leads to intensification that has consequences for the pedagogical process. Such expansion, caused by the need for salary supplementation, results in physical and emotional exhaustion and interferes, for example, with their training possibilities.

The organization of the school and the infrastructure available for work also appeared related to the decision to leave teaching in the São Paulo network. Sabia and Sordi (2021) state that objective conditions in the infrastructure dimension can compromise work development at school and the socially referenced quality in human training. For the authors, the school space, as the responsibility of the public authorities, must compose a coherent whole since it is there that the pedagogical practice is developed, and both the act of teaching and learning

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⁹ References to people, schools, or cities that could identify the subjects were omitted. For different cities, codes x, y, and z were used.

requires conditions conducive to the well-being of teachers and students. Such situations can be favorable or limiting for the training process.

According to Ribeiro (2004), in many cases, school buildings in Brazil are of poor quality, do not meet the minimum requirements of environmental comfort, and function in highly precarious conditions. The low quality of the school environment is generally attributed to the high maintenance costs of these spaces. According to the author, in many cases, a careless look at schools occurs, especially those aimed at the popular classes. Three of the interviewees mentioned the issue of physical facilities at schools, both central and peripheral schools, as highlighted in the excerpts below:

> …*it had a library and, as it was an old school, central, so at some point, there was a science laboratory that at that time was deactivated, there was a computer room more or less working, there was a patio, there was a cafeteria, there were sports courts, it was a big school, a school, shall we say, well structured, but it was an old school, it suffered from the wear and tear of time and the lack of investment*(P2).

> [Part of the school was] *closed, and no one had access, neither the students nor us. It could have been transformed into a pleasant environment,* [the school was] *completely grid fenced, perhaps because this neighborhood is a bit dangerous, let's say, there was even a part with trees in the background, but it was closed entirely… But the biggest problem was that most of my classes were at night. Now and then, we would run out of energy at school. Or we would have to stop the class because people were walking on top of the roof to go and bring drugs they hid on top of the school roof* (P4).

Adequate school space is essential for the institution to exercise its social role. It is an environment full of signs and meanings with a fundamental pedagogical part, which ranges from the layout of desks, building structure, and even painting conditions. The subjects' reports confirm Ribeiro's (2004) idea about the school space as a significant element of the hidden curriculum that has been constantly neglected. Like the adversities faced by teachers regarding the physical structure of the school environment, the lack of adequate materials to work in the classroom was another type of difficulty reported:

> *We didn't even have a printer to print the test, so if we wanted to, we had to either write the test on the blackboard or collect coins from the students to print each copy. I thought that was humiliating and absurd... I think this idea of the teacher's job being a social work ends up obscuring the role of the State, and I am against that* (P1).

In addition to the objective conditions of infrastructure for carrying out the teacher's work, other more subjective forms of school organization were identified as elements of dissatisfaction with teaching. An example of this is the lack of teaching autonomy indicated by P4:

> *I had been dissatisfied, let's say, for some time now, at least six months, a year already quite dissatisfied, with some things that happened at school. The student who didn't show up at school the entire year and in the last week of December he would show up, and the principal would order, forcing me to have the students passing the exams, even though the student never showed up, never having learned anything, didn't even know his face. I didn't even know his name, and you had to approve him because they had school goals .... Then I think because of that* [I resigned], *I was supposed to be in a better place* (P4).

From the empirical data, confronted with research already produced in the area, it was evident that the working conditions such as career, wages, working hours, and even the conditions of infrastructure or school organization are interrelated and were decisive for the resignation of teachers interviewed and, perhaps, help to problematize the high number of resignations that occur daily in the state network.

The analysis of the resignation phenomenon reveals that it is not episodic or isolated. Leaving the profession is something more than an act[10] (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020, p. 596), requiring a close look at the link between macro and micropolitics. Even if the data from the São Paulo state network, the largest in the country, are expressive and worrying, it is impossible to disaggregate the number of resignations of issues experienced daily by teachers.

Strategies of resistance to teacher resignation

As already indicated, resignation results from a process often marked by previous strategies of resistance aimed at resolving the situation that causes job dissatisfaction. Esteve (1992) states that teachers often maintain the desire to abandon the teaching profession. However, without conditions for a final decision that leads to actual abandonment, the teacher resorts to different mechanisms of evasion of everyday problems.

The research by Lapo and Bueno (2003) highlighted the phases that preceded the resignation of teachers, ranging from partial abandonment, covered by allowances and

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[10] Original excerpt: Dejar la profesión es algo más allá de um acto (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020, p. 596).

absences that guaranteed a certain distance from a possible conflicting reality, to the request for removal to another school, or even complacency characterized as 'distancing from the teaching activity through behaviors of indifference to everything that occurs in the school environment' (Lapo & Bueno, 2003, p. 13). Partial abandonment, according to the authors, was carried out for as long as possible until the teacher was able to reach definitive dropout, often constituting a long and painful process that occurred when the difficulties and dissatisfaction already weakened teachers, characterizing a resignation that is often traumatic, since not only a position was abandoned, but also people and dreams for which the teacher had dedicated themselves.

In this sense, not only resignation as an outcome of the process of teachers giving up work in a network or system should be an object of concern in public policies, but the actions that precede it also need to be considered, precisely because of the implications brought to the process of school organization which, in the face of resistance strategies, shows signs of fraying from the pedagogical point of view and interpersonal relationships.

One of the strategies that teachers resort to throughout the dissatisfaction process is to change schools. Likewise, removal, a voluntary request for transfer to another unit in the network, can be considered an attempt to remain in the public teaching profession in São Paulo despite the adversities or, at least, a way of delaying the decision. Two of the subjects interviewed resorted to this alternative. P3 requested the removal for greater comfort and safety when working in a place close to his residence. However, due to some conditions experienced at the new school, he asked for removal again, returning to the previous one, located in another municipality, until he finally decided to resign:

> *I became a tenured teacher in city A, and for the ideal of being able to work in the city where I live, I asked for removal, and I came to city B to a much bigger school, you know, with a different school reality. There wasn't a management team as close and welcoming as we had there* [at the other school]. *This was a shock of reality at first, and I could not develop my work; I suffered a lot with the issue of demands from the management team, but without any support, apart from the violence at school …. I ended up going back to city A, and I moved there again* (P3).

Removal, or transfer, is, therefore, 'a mechanism that, while offering the possibility to the teachers to distance themselves from situations that cause dissatisfaction and imbalance, also offers them the possibility of encountering other types of difficulties, maybe even bigger than the ones they had been facing' (Lapo & Bueno, 2003, p. 82). P3's experience endorses

this analysis, as the removal was requested twice in a short period to reduce the factors that caused job dissatisfaction.

It is also common in this process of gradual rupture with the network that there are absences and leaves. Lapo and Bueno (2003, p. 80) state that the temporary removal allows the teachers to 'balance themselves by distancing themselves from the difficulties that generate the conflicts they are experiencing.' Dissatisfaction with professional achievement and work development is a crucial point for the occurrence of these temporary departures. When teaching did not offer the necessary conditions for the slightest professional achievement, teachers sought, in a way that was not always conscious, alternatives to meet needs and expectations:

> *… in the state network, I couldn't teach more than 20 classes a week; it left me extremely exhausted. Even having only 20 a week, I missed a lot because I couldn't handle it* (P2).

> *… when I went back to City A this second time, according to the structure I had and the schedule and the lack of openness from the new management, I ended up excessively missing because there were some schedule shocks concerning the other job I already had, so I had to avoid it* (P3).

Lapo and Bueno (2003) worked with the hypothesis that absences and leave would be attempts by the teacher to remain oblivious to the challenges of the work context. P3 uses the term 'exhausted' to demonstrate his feelings about work, evidencing a process of physical and psychological suffering in which absences were a subterfuge to maintain balance. Subject 4, who had more than 50 classes a week, stated that the absences were due to the clash of schedules with other schools where he worked, a common situation when there is an accumulation of positions or itinerancy. The teacher also cited the lack of dialogue with school management when seeking to rearrange class schedules, evidencing the escape from conflicts implicit in the motivation for many absences and leaves that triggered absenteeism, discussed here in an expanded form under the name of gradual ruptures.

The term absenteeism, originating from studies in Administration and Sociology, designates the lack of attendance, and absence of the professional in the workplace, whether due to delay, absence, leave, or request for resignation by the worker (Bassi, 2010). For Dejours (1992), absenteeism is a form of escape mobilized by the worker when seeking balance in the face of dissatisfaction at work or even an alternative when reaching the limit of what is within the scope of the professional's personal decision. Teacher absenteeism, in this

sense, can be seen as a form of resistance that precedes the teacher's total quitting from the demands of work and the questions that arise in the profession. As part of the gradual rupture, the teacher resorts to strategies within his reach, especially those provided by law, such as absences and leaves. Table 3 illustrates the average number of teachers with absences in the São Paulo network during the period studied, which makes us think about the triggering reasons for absence:

Table 3

Average number of teachers with absences per year (2012-2018)

Year	Average no. of teachers	Average no. of teachers w/ Medical Absences	Average no. of teachers w/ Justified Absences	Average no. of teachers w/ Unjustified Absences	Average no. of teachers w/ Paid Absences
2012	224,493	25,656	23,096	4,660	65,870
2013	229,033	26,646	23,824	5,087	64,171
2014	237,559	28,473	24,049	4,906	69,772
2015	220,591	26,388	26,238	7,844	65,193
2016	206,468	22,289	21,614	5,659	57,102
2017	196,953	24,830	30,414	6,673	63,915
2018	190,184	22,675	21,453	5,026	58,854

Source: Own elaboration based on data provided via SIC (SIC-SP Protocol No. 442032014469)

For Malta (2014), absenteeism has consequences of different orders in schools: we can highlight the financial cost of replacing teachers, the pedagogical risks linked to uncertainties regarding the continuity of the content and the didactic sequence, and the disorganization of the structure and planning of classes and space, the occasional joining of classes and the gradual loss of identification of the teacher concerning the work team. In this sense, we resort to the note made by Sabia and Sordi (2021) when they advocate that the public power must recognize itself in the process of improving the quality of the school, assuming its part in supporting the teaching work, especially regarding the objective conditions of the schools.

When the teachers want to but cannot or may not resign, either for financial or legal reasons, or when they cannot make use of temporary abandonments or removal, or even when they resort to them, and the conflicts are not eliminated, tensions, frustrations, and other dissatisfactions at work that lead to psychic and physical exhaustion occur. When they see their attempts frustrated and their energies consumed to the point of not being able, in

fact, to continue working correctly, 'they will resort to another evasion mechanism, here called complacency' (Lapo & Bueno, 2003, p. 78), as P4's statement demonstrates:

> *I ended up withdrawing a lot, not getting involved anymore, and not proposing anything else because everything was barred. So I ended up sort of, everything they asked I did, as far as possible also because there were things I didn't do…*

> *In the last year, I only gave students coursework to do; I didn't give a test, really a test; written evaluation I didn't give it because it was just a hard time for the teacher* (P4).

Complacency can be understood as a way of giving up daily tasks arising from work. Emotional exhaustion caused by a combination of work-related factors, known as burnout, can also be a reason for resignation. All the teachers interviewed reported physical and emotional exhaustion, in addition to constant situations of suffering at work and questions about their professional meaning before deciding to resign, as expressed in the following excerpts:

> *I even got to talk to colleagues, we commented, man, I'm feeling inside Kafka's work, Metamorphosis, when the guy becomes an insect, he ends up little by little encompassing filth; he becomes dehumanized, that's what I felt from the State teacher, a process of dehumanization, and I was afraid that this process would happen to me at some point in my life or career, and that was one of the things I wanted to get away from, you know,* [in other networks] *I always had a very emotional involvement with the management team, with my colleagues, with my students mainly. There it seemed that I didn't want to develop this affection, I didn't want to develop this exchange, I kind of wanted to stay on the sidelines of it because it gave the impression of an abyss, you know, that you were there entering an abyss* (P1).

> *I like to teach, and I don't like to simply hold the position, saying I'm a teacher, but I'm not doing the job of a teacher; I'm not changing, transforming anyone's life …. I was an official; I was not a teacher!* (P4).

When physical and mental exhaustion affects teachers, the educational environment and pedagogical objectives are affected. This process leads professionals to alienation, dehumanization, and apathy, causing health problems, absenteeism, and even intention to leave the profession (Codo & Vasques-Menezes, 2000; Ferreira, 2011; OCDE, 2007). It is worth emphasizing that if the teachers have no other profitable activity that guarantees their survival and that of their family, it is unlikely they will permanently leave work, no matter how dissatisfied they may be.

It is interesting to observe that three of the four subjects used legal subterfuges to manage professional dissatisfaction: removal was requested twice by P3 and sought, albeit

without success, by P4. P2 and P3 made constant use of absences and leaves. P4, on the other hand, despite claiming not to have been absent from school until his resignation, demonstrated in his speeches the attitude of complacency in the face of the adversities experienced in everyday life. The only one who did not show characteristics of this process of gradual rupture was P1, but, considering that this subject resigned within a year after being approved in the public hiring process, it is likely that the short time of bond built with the work justifies the quick decision for resignation.

An essential and fundamental data obtained in the interviews was the recognition that all teachers resigned from their position in the state public service but did not give up the teaching profession since they continued to work in other teaching networks. This data reinforced the importance of considering working conditions – not just those highlighted in this article – for permanence in the public education network, taking them as principles articulated with the formation, attraction, and maintenance of education professionals.

Final Considerations

Giving up the teaching position is the outcome of a process arising from the weakening of work ties (cause of the gradual abandonment of the activity and the consequent cancellation of obligations assumed with the school institution), and this weakening of relations is, in turn, the result of the working conditions to which this professional is subjected. Therefore, the high resignation that has occurred in recent years in the São Paulo state network is a factor that highlights the precariousness of working conditions in schools under Seduc's responsibility. While the data analyzed in the light of the literature and the recognition of its causes are worrisome, it must be admitted that they still do not correspond to the totality of teachers who annually leave the public school system in São Paulo since the official records consider only the disengagement of the tenured teacher. It is likely that many non-tenured teachers, who in 2018 represented 36% of the teaching staff (Barbosa et al. 2020), leave the state network annually. Still, there is statistical invisibility about these since Seduc claims not to have data on these teachers.

Research by Gonzalez-Escobar et al. (2020) on the teaching abandonment of teachers at the beginning of their careers in Latin America identified that dropout could occur in different ways: teaching abandonment – referring to professionals who stop acting as teachers, abandoning not only the classroom and the school; stop teaching – refers to those who leave the classroom to occupy other public positions related to education. The empirical data in this article disagreed with these categories presented about beginning teachers, as the four subjects continued teaching in other teaching networks in better working conditions, which suggests that the resignation of the teaching position in the São Paulo public network by these subjects was not due to a wrong choice of profession, but instead as a result of a process of professional devaluation that did not guarantee adequate working conditions for the permanence of the teaching profession. The empirical data from the interviews also show that it is essential to state that they were not mobilized to generalize the causes of the resignation of teachers. From a methodological point of view, we could not even have such a claim. However, as the data found support in the literature on which the article was based, corroborating critical and previous studies carried out in the education field, they can be considered representative of the phenomenon of resignation.

This also clashes with the conclusions provided by the study on teacher abandonment in Latin America, which, without abandoning multidimensional complexity, chooses to highlight micropolitics with reasons associated with power relations within the school that have repercussions on interpersonal tensions that can be determinant for teacher abandonment[11] (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020, 598), we confirm with empirical data the essentiality of working conditions arising from the macro-policy justified by the New Public Management that has manifested itself in schools through career plans and salaries and programs and projects that do not decently value teaching work. In this sense, the data analyzed here showed that resignation is not reduced to a few isolated cases in the network. Still, they indicated a situation that remained constant, continuous, and high in the analyzed period, reinforcing the need for a close look at objective working conditions that serve not only as an initial attraction in the teaching career but also aim at permanence in the teaching profession. This is an essential requirement so that policies for training and attracting teachers

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[11] Original text: Razones associadas a la relación de poder al interior de la escuela, que repercutem em tensiones interpersonales que podrían derivar em las causas determinantes del abandono docente (Gonzalez-Escobar et al., 2020, 598).

take place together, making it possible to reduce teacher resignation and minimize previous aspects related to it, such as absenteeism, turnover, and complacency, that have implications for the process of pedagogical organization of schools.

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