

Lifelong learning and inexhaustible professional reinvention ^{1 2 3}

A aprendizagem ao longo da vida e a infinita reinvenção profissional

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Abstract

The objective of the article is to analyze how working subjects are directed toward adaptation and renewal through lifelong learning. The empirical material consists of articles from the newspaper Valor Econômico and four interviews. The analysis presents three mechanisms: directing the subjects to a permanent search for updates; the need for endless adaptations; and directing the subjects to an unrestrained competition and individualization. The final considerations point out that, for being at war with themselves and with others, these subjects feel that they need, somehow, to be always after a new ability that will give them some differential and produce workability.

Keywords: lifelong learning, governmentality, adaptability

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Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar como os sujeitos trabalhadores são direcionados para a adaptação e renovação por meio da aprendizagem ao longo da vida. A empiria é constituída por matérias do jornal Valor Econômico e quatro entrevistas. Já a análise apresenta três mecanismos: direcionamento dos sujeitos para uma busca permanente por atualizações; necessidade de adaptações intermináveis; e encaminhamento dos sujeitos para uma competição e individualização desenfreada. As considerações finais apontam que, por estarem em guerra consigo mesmos e com os outros, tais sujeitos sentem que precisam, de alguma forma, estar sempre atrás de uma nova habilidade que lhes proporcione algum diferencial e produza trabalhabilidade.

Palavras-chave: *aprendizagem ao longo da vida, governamentalidade, adaptabilidade*

Introduction

Education and work are undergoing several and rapid changes which affect subjectivities. Various discourses recreate realities and consolidate truths, one of which is the need for flexible, uninterrupted and individualized learning as a strategy to maintain workability conditions. Lifelong learning has become paramount and greatly accepted during the 21st century in European Union member countries and various organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (Ireland, 2013).

In Brazil, the concept of lifelong learning has been promoted since the late 1990s and early 2000s (D'Avila, 2012), becoming a constitutional right in 2020. Hence, this article analyzes how workers are driven to adapt and reinvent themselves by this inexhaustible learning. More specifically, we investigate the tactics mobilized by a commercial journal in convincing readers to engage in these processes and its articulations with statements by working subjects on their own formative trajectory.

Our analysis will be developed based on two sets of empirical data. First, a set of digital articles published on the Career section of the *Valor Econômico* newspaper, a widely circulated

publication among managers of Brazilian companies, from 2018 to 2022. Inspired by Camozzato (2014), we assume that the prognoses from economic journalism fabricate contexts that function as truths, leading to changes in the market, in economic sectors and in subjects' attitude. The second consists of four interviews, conducted after registration with the National Research Ethics Commission under number 5.207.233 (20/01/2022). We selected two men and two women with at least a bachelor's degree, active in the labor market and engaged in continuing education programs. Regarding professional activity, the group includes 1. Jailson⁴ a former oil and gas company employee who now works as a pastor; 2. Daenerys: a kindergarten teacher; 3. Helkia: a marketing entrepreneur; and 4. Fernando: a former Information Technology (IT) professional who is now a lawyer.

In the following section, we develop some problematizations about lifelong learning. Next, we analyze the *Valor Econômico* articles and the interviews, pointing out the converging conceptions. Given the extensive number of newspaper articles published, the analysis will only present elements from some of these. The final considerations close the article.

Lifelong Learning

According to Simons and Masschelein (2011), we live in a learning society, which has led people to understand that their future depends on their learning trajectory. In a learning society, everyone is individually responsible for continuing to learn. Authors such as Olsson and Petersson (2008), as well as the OECD and UNESCO, employ the term *lifelong learning*. According to Olssen (2008), "knowledge" has been replaced by "learning," that is, a goal by a process. In this regard, we understand that lifelong learning is geared towards transforming subjectivities rather than acquiring new knowledge.

Nicoll and Fejes (2008) point out that lifelong learning is being assumed as a way of overcoming the individual challenges of the contemporary world regarding work and income generation. Entities such as the European Union and the OECD defend it as "an important policy that enables economic and entrepreneurial competitiveness, (self-)employability, individual fulfillment and self-development" (Formicuzzi et al. 2016, p. 52). Lifelong learning has been embedded within national and international policies as "as a truth, as a required

⁴ These alias were chosen by the interviewees and may or may not correspond to their real names.

response to an increasing pace of change, the economic and social pressures of globalization and uncertainty over the future” (Nicoll & Fejes, 2008, p. 1).

For Fejes (2008), discourses on lifelong learning are constituted as a way for individuals to achieve their goals. The author adopts the Foucauldian concept of governmentality, or rather of neoliberal governmentality, as a theoretical-methodological lens to analyze lifelong learning. In the lecture series *The Birth of Biopolitics*, taught in 1979, Foucault (2010, p. 92) understands governmentality as an *art of government*, analyzing “the way in which the domain of the practice of government, with its different objects, general rules, and overall objectives, was established so as to govern in the best possible way” (Foucault, 2010, p. 26). From there, Foucault advances in his investigations, identifying a new self-limited modern governmental *ratio*, that is, regulated by political economy, which will operate from the 18th century onwards, as liberalism is consolidated.

He also discusses an inflection operated by the 21st century liberal governmentality towards a neoliberal governmentality, which adopts competition as its principle of intelligibility and is focused on producing self-entrepreneur subjects. They must take future in their own hands, making their human capital grow and, consequently, assuming the risks therein, adapting to the neoliberal concept of individualization as a social policy. “In short, it does not involve providing individuals with a social cover for risks, but according everyone a sort of economic space within which they can take on and confront risks” (Foucault, 2010, p. 188). If producing human capital, consisting of individual skills that allow subjects to earn labor income, is closely linked to education, lifelong learning should be taken on as a sort of continuous investment that turn individuals into a high-return valuable asset.

Olssen (2008) points out that, within Foucauldian studies, lifelong learning constitutes a new technology of power, becoming one more component in the multiple control mechanisms mobilized by neoliberal society. “In this sense, lifelong learning is a market discourse that orientates education to the enterprise society where the learner becomes an entrepreneur of himself” (Olssen, 2008, p. 41). It is a society ideal in which learning takes a central role, placing individuals in a position where they cannot go through life without participating in schooling one way or another. Zackrisson and Assarsson (2008) state that refusing to embrace this imperative of endless learning process becomes increasingly unlikely. Discourses and policies describe great advantages and benefits that hinder criticizing and problematizing what is being

offered or the type of learning. “In other words, who can say ‘no thank you’ to participating in lifelong learning?” (Zackrisson & Assarsson, 2008, p. 115).

In this perspective, an individual’s future and emancipation will depend entirely on his learning choices, and blame cannot be assigned to anyone but himself for any mishaps in this process. It is the ideal of an autonomous, flexible, enterprising and independent subject who willfully builds their career and is responsible for updating and acquiring skills to take their place in society. Someone who does not rely on public policies, repudiating all types of state action as social justice is replaced by meritocracy. This seems to be the ideal promoted by the *Valor Econômico* newspaper articles and constitute the research subjects, according to the analyses that we will present in the next section.

You must reinvent yourself continually

Currently, the sense of responsibility for one’s situation haunts many unemployed or low-income people who ignore the structural causes of their problems. An outlet would be training centers, which supposedly provide quick training, or “professional retraining.” This has become increasingly common, as these refresher courses would afford them a chance of finding light at the end of the tunnel. Hence, the adaptation and renewal required of them is related to their possibility of entering the market game. That is, “being an inhabitant of the learning society means not only to want to be creative and to want to participate, but implies in a more general way the will to invest with regard to a future return, i.e. to subjugate under a permanent economic tribunal” (Simons & Masschelein, 2011, p. 130).

In the following sections we present three subjectivation mechanisms that resulted in three areas of analysis: first, the imperative of an unbridled search for refreshers; second, the need for endless adaptations; and finally, that subjects are being led towards unbridled competition and individualization.

Unbridled search for refreshers

Valor Econômico newspaper articles operate a governance strategy that directs subjects towards an incessant search for training course options or certifications. They argue that “constant learning is essential nowadays” (Barros, 2021), “reflection and self-knowledge are fundamental to any career-related process” (Esteves, 2022), “you cannot end university learning anymore,” “knowledge needs to be acquired throughout one’s career,” “there’s no need to attend long-term courses” (Barros, 2021), “the harder you work, the more you learn” (Garcia, 2021a) and “learning is part of the job itself these days” (Bloch, 2021). This requires “accelerated learning” (Campos, 2021a), a “willingness to learn continuously” (Saraiva, 2022) and “permanent self-development” (Bernhoeft, 2020).

An analysis of the selected articles also shows that several of them promote the idea that workers must endlessly seek out experiences on their own, which will enable them to learn something. We highlight some of the terms and expressions featured in the articles analyzed: “studies, courses, lectures and workshops”; “microlearning” (Barros, 2021); “relearning and reviewing concepts” (Campos, 2021b); “developing skills” (Esteves, 2022); “qualifications and refresher courses” (Oliveira, 2021); “professional retraining” (Bernhoeft, 2019); “e-learning” (Saraiva, 2021a); “retraining” (Saraiva, 2021c); “permanent reviewing” (Bernhoeft, 2021); “total recycling” (Bigarelli, 2019a); “upskilling” (Bigarelli, 2019b); and “nanodegrees” (Arcoverde, 2019). Nanodegrees⁵ was introduced by the Udacity platform and refers to short refresher courses, with content designed according to the demands of large tech organizations, such as Google or Amazon, and divided into projects or credentials to be executed by students. The term appears in the article “Aprender a aprender: uma lição para todos” [Learning to learn: a lesson to all], written by Letícia Arcoverde and published on July 29, 2019.

Intending to answer the question of “how can we plan for the future, given the rapid pace of change?,” she mobilizes authoritative voices from the business world indicating that “thinking about a career in this context will require looking for new ways to learn and, above all, a willingness to always keep up to date” (Arcoverde, 2019). For Samantha Mazzero, vice-coordinator of the international Master of Business Administration (MBA) at the Fundação Instituto de Administração, formal education is unable to train professionals with the speed

The prefix nano- indicates extremely short courses. While the prefix micro refers to 10⁻⁶, nano refers to 10⁻⁹.

required by the market, which is why nanodegrees offered online and focused on certification in specific skills are on the rise. “The professional of the future is one with the ability to adapt and a predisposition to learn” (Mazzero cf. Arcoverde, 2019).

According to Insper professor Leni Hidalgo (cf. Arcoverde, 2019), “one must to be constantly informed about market and social movements and have the critical capacity to filter out what will be important in building one’s career.” Another of her recommendations for professionals in different fields is that they seek to become “a circulating expert.” In a comment characteristic of neoliberal rationality, she ends by directing subjects towards self-government, warning that “this is no longer a world in which a person can secure themselves with individual expertise” (Hidalgo cf. Arcoverde, 2019). According to Foucault (2010a, p. 97), “there is no liberalism without a culture of danger.” Insecurity, uncertainty and instability lead people on an unbridled quest.

It is noteworthy that two PhD professors linked to higher education institutions believe that education processes should be focused on fast courses, with little depth and focused on immediate market demands. These courses are generally not linked to academic institutions, but to platforms. In the article, the interviewees seem unconcerned with emphasizing the importance of more solid and in-depth training related to formal education.

Another term to highlight is microlearning, a learning strategy that uses content fragmented into modules for rapid assimilation. The term appears in the article “As profissões mais demandadas para 2022” [The most in-demand professions in 2022], written by Fabiana Barros (2021) and published on November 28, 2021, which gives some tips on how to stand out in the labor market. Pedro Moxotó, senior manager at Hays, says that “more than ever, the ability to adapt to new contexts is essential for professionals in general. Moreover, innovation is on the rise, making the logic of interaction with current events essential” (Moxotó cf. Barros, 2021). He continues by stating that the constant quest to develop qualifications and master new languages is a need that will always exist. Moxotó’s statement indicates that specialists are obsolescent and that incessant interactivity is paramount. Adaptability is not developed by solid training via long-term courses, but in the volatility of nanodegrees and microlearning, in which one not only learns something for the future but also forget past learnings.

The article continues with arguments from Carla Esteves, vice-president of people and business strategies at Cia. de Talentos group, and Alexandre Benedetti, director of Talenses.

Esteves points to microlearning as a learning option that gives people the chance to explore various subjects in a short period of time. For Benedetti, “companies are looking for people with good behavioral skills, who know themselves and are willing to evolve” (Benedetti cf. Barros, 2021). Thus, lifelong learning is not just about knowledge, but also about behavioral issues, learning to conduct oneself differently. Of note is that OECD demands the inclusion of socio-emotional skills development in school curricula (2021). In Brazil, the National Common Curriculum Base (BNCC) includes socio-emotional competencies among the ten to be developed in basic education.

Evolution (Barros, 2021), circulation and pre-disposition (Arcoverde, 2019) refer to an effort to ensure that professionals never feel secure or stable. Mobility is encouraged by statements that lead subjects towards an unbridled search for learning options as a way of “reinventing” themselves professionally. The articles “Não podemos delegar nosso desenvolvimento profissional” [We can’t delegate our professional development], published on November 19, 2019, and “Pandemia também permite aprendizado” [The pandemic also enables learning], on July 3, 2021, both written by Renato Bernhoeft, go in the same direction.

In “Não podemos delegar nosso desenvolvimento profissional,” Bernhoeft (2019) states that “technological changes demand that individuals increasingly take responsibility for their own qualifications and development.” He explains that constant change brings with it a need for human beings to increasingly and individually take ownership of their educational process in a broad and permanent manner. The columnist states that “we will need to reinvent ourselves indefinitely throughout our lives” (Bernhoeft, 2019). In the article “Pandemia também permite aprendizado,” Bernhoeft (2021) affirms that “there are no longer professions or careers for life” and that “it is our responsibility to be constantly aware of new demands and to take on self-development as our own responsibility.”

We end this section by showing the agreement between the *Valor Econômico* articles and statements from Jailson. He, who has been working since he was 16, worked on an oil distributor for 21 years, the last seven of which he spent as a manager. Throughout his professional life, his promotions were related to the many refresher courses he took. He believes, however, that the benefits go beyond his career.

Jailson: We can't stop. We can't get stuck in time. Our whole being benefits when we don't stand still; we have to seek knowledge somehow. I believe we need to improve in all aspects.

He sees being on the move as a way of avoiding obsolescence, giving a sense of performativity to life by indicating a need for continuous improvement. For Ball (2005, p. 543), “performativity is a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change.” The interview continues:

Jailson: In every course I took, teachers would point to things I had learned in previous courses and say “it's not like that anymore, things have changed, the understanding has changed...” There's no way about it, we always need to be in search of knowledge. I study constantly so as to not be behind the times.

By saying “there's no way about it,” Jailson reaffirms the perceived lack of alternative to endless learning, naturalizing the understanding that such refreshers are mandatory for staying in the market. Responsible for a learning that has shifted from a right to an imperative (Biesta, 2021) in order to keep up with the rapid changes in the job market, it is up to subjects, as entrepreneurs of themselves and through an endless quest for learning, to adapt frantically in their professional careers.

Unbridled adaptation

Below we will discuss some excerpts from the interviews conducted, selected by mentions of this need for adaptations as a task to be undertaken through learning. These statements are linked to narratives about restarting, changes or discontinuity in professional life. Let us return to Jailson's arguments.

Jailson: Human beings are not one hundred percent in any aspect and never will be, and they need to be constantly improving. Even if they do something well, there will always be gaps, aspects to be improved upon and reviewed.

After losing his job at the oil distributor, he is now in pastoral ministry, an unregulated profession in Brazil. According to Silva (2020), Law considers this to be an activity related to religious vocation and not a professional activity. Nonetheless, Jailson shows great appreciation

for the incorporation of corporate techniques and values, such as the search for maximum work efficiency. Aiming for excellence in his new job, he continues to strive for continuous improvement.

Jailson: I reinvent myself. I'm always looking for knowledge, for a new course to take. For example, right now I'm taking a new course in theology, although I already took one. I'm taking a new one so I don't stay behind.

Another interviewee, Fernando, a professional with 14 years' experience in IT, says that he left his last formal job as a teacher after observing the dynamics within the university, where he saw no prospect of growth. Upon seeing the devaluation of higher education, he decided to get a new degree in Law, area in which he now works as a self-employed criminal lawyer. To him, all this change "is perhaps not a reinvention, but some changes in strategies... some a little more significant than others" (Fernando). A few moments later, however, he backtracks when commenting on his strategies for staying in the market, reflecting that "maybe it's exactly a matter of reinvention, because, in fact, I've been specializing even more in the criminal area while working in other areas."

Today, he considers to be very well paid, works very little and manages to earn a reasonable income. However, in line with the business maxim of endless adaptation, he reports that:

Fernando: I feel satisfied, but I'm ready to leave the profession. Even though I admire and like the career, I often say that I have no love for practically anything; what interests me is what suits me. I'm extremely satisfied with what the profession has given me, but I say that I'm ready to leave it because if by any chance the law business goes downhill, then I'd have to reinvent myself all over again. But that won't be a hardship for me because I've been psychologically preparing myself for this for a long time. I've always migrated between professions throughout my life, between formal and informal activities; that won't be a hardship for me or anything new. Also, the legal profession is continuously changing, but if I feel uncomfortable continuing to work, I'm ready to quit.

If the decision to study law had been made today, he says, he would have looked for something that allowed him more autonomy.

Fernando: If it had been today, I probably wouldn't have gone through the suffering as I did during those five years outside the municipality. I could probably have even more strength to stay in the market, even if a informal one, but in commerce to become an entrepreneur, to have autonomy, to have freedom and to seek the least hierarchical, subordinate and formal ties.

For Chamayou (2020, p. 389), the seduction imposed by neoliberalism is related, among other things, to the promise of individual autonomy, since neoliberal reason imagines an emancipated subject in control of their life and totally responsible for it.

Finally, Hélika's arguments echoes the meanings of performativity, since for her, "it's always that issue: no matter how good we are in an area, we can always improve a little more." Her statements reproduce the maxim of unfinished improvement, with emphasis on the terms "reinvent," "adapt" and "transform": "You have to reinvent yourself every day. And I have to adapt all the time. I'm constantly evolving and transforming."

For the research subjects, engaging in lifelong learning implies taking on characteristics such as self-responsibility, a predisposition to change, movement, transformation and adaptability. They are all self-focused, with no perception of the interdependence of others. Kampff (2018) uses the term engagement to define that which is related to the subjects' involvement in causes, activities or projects, maintaining the focus of work and persisting in achieving the related objectives. From a competitive perspective, Martins and Machado write that (2018, p. 105) "engaged people are more likely to succeed." Learners' commitment would be to not give up, to fight and to seek incessantly (and on their own) to surpass themselves through learning, as a way of having a better life.

The tireless transformation of those whose purpose is to turn the dream of a better life into reality allows us to identify this lifelong learner's engagement as an entrepreneur, given the great energy and countless challenges this requires. In a logic in which there are no third parties to attribute failures or successes to, subjects have no one to turn to but themselves by means of a performativity that must be constantly improved. For Ball (2005), performativity culture brings about a flow of new needs, expectations and indicators, which gives us a sense of accountability and continuous evaluation. This results in

...a constant search for improvement, to be better, to be excellent, another way of becoming or striving to be the best—the endless search for perfection. (Ball, 2005, p. 549)

In the quest for maximum performance, individuals and organizations will do whatever they can to distinguish themselves or survive. Performativity has great power to create subjects and drive behavior, relating to an emotional dimension despite the appearance of rationality and objectivity. “Thus, responses to the flow of performance information can engender individual feelings of pride, guilt, shame and envy” (Ball, 2005, p. 550).

Regarding the articles selected, we observed that several of them promote the idea that rapid and immediate change and adaptation are positive elements for workers, who must prepare for them and even desire them. According to the texts, individuals must be the agent of this change, as they must learn to adapt so they can take advantage of opportunities.

In the article “Aprenda todos os dias com quem está ao seu lado” [Learn every day from those around you], published on November 11, 2021, Vicky Bloch (2021) points out that “in the contemporary world, where the speed of change is high and we fall behind in the blink of an eye, we have to learn, unlearn and reinvent ourselves all the time.” She also points out that we mustn’t fall into the “trap” that everything is mastered. According to Olssen (2008, p. 40), “learning in this sense is an ongoing permanent addition of competences and skills adapted continuously to real external needs.”

Rafael Souto, in the article “Paternalismo gera danos irreparáveis na carreira” [Paternalism causes irreparable damage to careers], published on December 3, 2020, also warns that “in a rapidly changing world, the ability to innovate and adapt is fundamental.” Souto uses research published in an article by consultants Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie, in which they argue that contemporary managers must launch an adaptive challenge in their organizations. This challenge aims to “generate discomfort, stimulate change and give your team the psychological security to take risks, question processes and seek innovation” (Souto, 2020).

Workforce and worker adaptability and mobility through the acquisition of short-term skills and competencies is resumed by Lyndsey Jones (2020) in the article “Habilidades profissionais essenciais a partir de 2020” [Essential professional skills for 2020]. According to her:

With the growth of the gig economy, more organizations will protect themselves by hiring workers for fixed terms. These outsourcers will have to adapt quickly to company cultures and be flexible and adaptable.

These statements produce “a new technology of flexible adaptation” which “ensures that responsibility for employment tenure belongs to individuals themselves” (Olssen, 2008, p. 39). In short, workers must learn to live precariously. Jones also points out a supposed ease that the generation born between 1981 and 1999 has in relation to change, emphasizing that “millennials don’t see change as a trial, but as an opportunity” (Jones, 2020). In other words, the author imagines an idealized and homogeneous youth, for whom the risks of precariousness are not frightening. The article also posits a “great” hope for the older generations: the solution would be to improve themselves.

Claudio Garcia, in the article “Para ser adaptável não defina o que é talent” [To be adaptable, don’t define what talent is], published on September 23, 2021, also shares the idea that old skills are obsolete. He comments that professionals who are very efficient in their tasks run the risk of giving up their ability to adapt. To him, an organization that values adaptation “consciously accepts inefficiencies in certain scenarios for the sake of adaptability” (Garcia, 2021b). This means “goodbye” to specialization and “welcome” to fragmentation. Even efficiency, an unquestionable quality until recently, is being sacrificed on the altar of flexibility.

While adaptation and renewal are considered necessary elements in the face of changes in the global economy and the labor world, the market, in turn, becomes “a process of continuous learning and permanent adaptation” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 135). Not only that, but the market is also defined “precisely by its intrinsically competitive nature” (Dardot & Laval, 2016, p. 136). Thus, subjects are driven to launch themselves, in an individualized manner, into unbridled competition in the search for learning as a way of standing out in the market. This is what we will discuss in the next section.

Unbridled competition and individuality

People lacking labor market stability are mainly concerned with trying to maintain their workability at competitive levels (Possebon, 2020). Enmeshed in a governmental reason whose regulating principle is the mechanisms of competition (Foucault, 2010a), these subjects see themselves as managers of their own lives engaged in battling others, and often themselves, in looking for ways to survive.

Excerpts from Fernando, Hélika and Jaílson's interviews presented below show elements constitutive of competitive subjects or, in other words, entrepreneurs of themselves (Foucault, 2010). Not only do they compete with others, but above all they compete with themselves, in a perennial internalized war.

Helkia: I demand a lot from myself... I always say that, from my point of view, my competition isn't with others, it's with myself. I competed with others for a long time and today I think that's because I am closed-minded. When I'm too closed-minded my competitive streak increases. That's me; the self is important in my analysis.

Fernando: I believe that there is competition, but one that is neither open nor blatant. It exists on the part of less-prepared colleagues, because people often look for the lowest price due to lack of knowledge and lack of money. This also happens in Law. As a professional, particularly, I don't compete with anyone but myself. I think about that a lot.

Jaílson: I don't believe competition exists in the ministry; I don't see it that way. I think that in any profession, you need to be constantly improving yourself. And in this process you see yourself as a competitor... As you're competing with yourself, you need to be in constant pursuit of knowledge.

Han (2015, p. 16) understands this as an internalized war. The author states that the achievement-subject gives itself over to maximizing productivity continuously, entering in competition with themselves and, instead of disciplinary obligations, they obey their own interests and their own pressure for improvement leading to auto-exploitation. Hence, the world of lifelong learning consists of lonely and solitary learners. "It is a world devoid of community and commitment within which, increasingly, social relations are valued solely for their extrinsic worth" (Ball, 2013, p. 151). In line with these problematizations, Corbanezi (2018) notes that "the modern subject no longer has as maxims obedience to others, compliance with the law and duty, but the feeling of 'freedom' and 'autonomy'."

Alone, it remains for the entrepreneur to maintain the necessary conditions to compete, to beat the competition. An excerpt from Daenerys' interview on how she prepares to remain active in the labor market expands on this argument.

Daenerys: Studying... unfortunately... even if in reality we come to the conclusion that it's useless, but you do it by studying, by learning.

Researcher: You say it's useless, yet you're still betting on it?

Daenerys: Even if it's useless, we insist on it anyway. We need knowledge so as to not get left behind, because you know that the labor market is becoming increasingly more competitive. Even though difficult, the situation could get worse. That's why we end up trying to learn more and more, to improve. I study to survive... it's about survival. This is how I survive. From the beginning I study to put food on the table. My situation would be much more precarious if I wasn't studying.

Daenerys continues in her quest for learning, even though she no longer believes in its effects. Laval (2019, p. 74) argues that “more than a response to the need for autonomy and personal development, it is the obligation to survive in the labor market that commands this pedagogization of life.” Individuals turn to learning not out of will, curiosity or pleasure, but as a prevention against market risks. And as Daenerys points out, the supposed benefits of this inexhaustible learning are quite uncertain.

In turn, the newspaper articles selected mobilizes arguments to lead subjects towards a permanent competition supported by isolation, operating a governance strategy. These go along the lines of “thinking alone (rather than in group) brings more and better ideas” (Esteves, 2022), “professionals need to take charge of their own career development” (Bigarelli, 2021), “you need to know your strengths and weaknesses” (Bigarelli, 2022b), “learning alone... a skill on the rise” (Saraiva, 2021b), “you can prepare to be more competitive in the future of work even if that future isn't very clear yet” (Bigarelli, 2021) and “individualization of the career project” (Souto, 2021a).

We focused our attention on the expression “*trabalhabilidade*” [workability], used by Paulo Vasconcellos in the article “‘Trabalhabilidade’ é a palavra da hora” [‘Workability’ is the word of the hour], published on June 27, 2018. The text begins by arguing that lifelong learning is merely a reflection of societal changes and stems from recurring corporate and personal

demands. “Some professions tend to disappear and more than ever we need to reinvent ourselves” (Vasconcellos, 2018). The article continues evoking the authorized voice of Irene Azevedo, director of career transition and change management at Lee Hecht Harrison (LHH). She states that the concept of employability has lost ground to the term workability, and it is up to the learner to keep up with these developments throughout life.

Learning, regardless of age or schooling level, together with self-knowledge, willingness, dedication, commitment, experience and even health, are elements that must be self-managed by the individuals themselves if they are to have a competitive advantage. Under this rationality, “we must produce individuals who know how to take charge of their lives, who are capable of taking responsibility for their own well-being and productivity” (Saraiva, 2013, p. 170).

Workability is also used by Rafael Souto in the article “O futuro do trabalho chegou mais cedo” [The future of work has arrived early], published on February 11, 2022. Employing an intimidating tone, the text warns that professionals who fail to adapt to the new requirements are doomed to decline. Souto (2021b) points out that “we are in the era of workability, in which each individual must take care of their ability to generate work and income.” The article closes by warning about the possibility of unemployment for those who fail to keep up with the ongoing changes. Souto exempts the economy and other social issues from possible mass layoffs, putting the reason for such layoffs down to the outdated nature of workers who can no longer meet the needs of companies.

Another theme found in several articles was the appeal to entrepreneurship, used as a strategy to promote job opportunities. Lyndsey Jones (2020) points out that, for Sue Llewellyn, a UK social media consultant, we can only see change as an opportunity, rather than a trial, if we have a mindset of personal growth and entrepreneurship. She advises: “Think about what you want from your life and make a small change. You’ll soon see that you’ve made a big change. People don’t realize that the only constant in life is change and that nothing stays the same” (Llewellyn cf. Jones, 2020). According to the article, only the entrepreneur would possess the necessary qualities to adapt to the rapid transformations in the labor world.

In the article “Que exaustão! Onde você está, empreendedor?” [That’s exhaustive! Where are you, entrepreneur?], published on May 13, 2021, Betânia Tenure pointed to entrepreneurial competence as a possible solution for combating the pandemic scenario as,

according to the columnist, those with this competence would be able to identify the problem without sticking to complaints. According to her, in situations where difficulties reign:

There is no better scenario for entrepreneurs, some of whom are hidden in the halls of typical corporate world, to emerge, flourish and make things happen. Now is the time for those who can “smell” the opportunities, see the risks and act to change reality. (Tanure, 2021)

For the columnist, these are the individuals capable of “coming out of their shell.” In this regard, the entrepreneur is one who thinks differently, who produces ideas, who dreams, who discovers opportunities and who has problem-solving and decision-making skills, thus becoming a sought-after individual adapted to the high competition scenario.

However, for Dardot and Laval (2020, p. 134), the entrepreneur is not a producer or innovator, but “a being endowed with a commercial spirit, looking for any profit opportunity that presents itself and that they can take advantage of, thanks to the information they have that others lack.” This individual is governed by the game of the market, which in turn is a process of continuous learning and permanent adaptation, characterized by unending competition. For Simons and Masschelein (2008), the emphasis on the social citizen was shifted to the entrepreneurial citizen taken on as a permanent learner, the new form of self-government promoted and encouraged by neoliberal capitalism.

This entrepreneur-subject no longer sees risk as something to be avoided; rather, they get along well. Risks are understood as opportunities, the stimulus for possible achievements that incites their action. People must see themselves as components of a constantly changing and uncertain environment, in which needs can be met by means of creative skills and endless learning. This subject is asked to “invest in human capital, to learn or to add value to the self and to find ways of productive inclusion” (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 54).

Simons and Masschelein (2008) understand that entrepreneurship requires from individuals a series of moving around in which skills, competencies and knowledge are mobilized to remain active in the market and give economic value to one’s own life. For the authors, “to live an entrepreneurial life is not about having a position in a normal, socialized structure but is about moving in different environments or networks and to remain employed in the ‘continuous business of living’” (Simons & Masschelein, 2008, p. 55).

Individuals are responsible for continuously evaluating, pondering and overcoming the limits of their learning to acquire competitive conditions to beat competitors. Subjects are responsible for maintaining workability, which results from skills acquired by them to carve a place in the labor world, whereas learning becomes an activity that every individual must perform incessantly throughout their lives.

Final considerations

Through a Foucauldian approach it is therefore possible to ask questions other than those offered by positivism or by alternative interpretative perspectives. Instead of focusing on lifelong learning as something that is effective or ineffective in terms of policy or other aims, is essentially good or bad, or as something which can free people from constraints, we pose quite other questions. (Fejes, 2008, p. 16)

This study explored how a governance strategy aimed at directing subjects towards inexhaustible lifelong learning operates. It drives individuals to an unbridled search for refresher courses, the need for endless reinvention and adaptations, and unbridled competition and individualization. Such governance strategy operates by constituting regimes of truths that, when naturalized, seek to persuade all of the need to invest permanently in themselves, becoming lifelong learners. These people, through an endless search for adaptability, dream of remaining attractive to the labor market and achieving happiness and prosperity in a context of rapid change.

Workers are expected to be active, responsible, independent and problem-solving individuals (Zackrisson & Assarsson, 2008). They also realize this need for self-development and continuous decision-making by means of individualized attitudes, generating a sense of autonomy and being prepared for a life of uncertainty guided by constant self-improvement (Popkewitz, 2008). At war with themselves, these individuals feel that they must somehow always be on the lookout for a new skill that will set them apart.

Importantly, the research indicates that the desirable worker training would favor a sequence of short, quick refresher courses with little depth to the detriment of longer, more solid academic education. Both the newspaper and the interviewees concurred that continuing

education would be more effective if conducted outside higher education institutions, which are considered incapable of adapting to the market's high volatility and keeping up with the rapid pace of change. Training for professional "performance" improvement should prioritize knowledge that is ready for immediate consumption, without the need to invest much reflective effort.

Hence, lifelong learning has been redesigning the veridiction system which enshrined universities as the privileged locus for professional education and training by bestowing on other training opportunities greater value in terms of usefulness and effectiveness.

As envisaged by the epigraph, this investigation did not intend to position lifelong learning as something right or wrong, good or bad, but to discuss how it operates and is constituted (Veiga-Neto, 2017). Far from claiming to establish new truths, we hope that this research may offer a perspective for problematizing the veridiction regimes of our time.

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