

Work, education and health and other possible: dialogues in the perspective of ergology

The construction of the 'ergology approach to work' is a scientific and human story that emerges from the collaboration among three researchers - Yves Schwartz, philosopher; Daniel Faïta, linguist; and Bernard Vuillon, sociologist - who, founded the Multidisciplinary Analysis of Work Situations (APST) device together between 1983 and 1984. Their challenge was to analyze changes in work that raised strong questions about how to prepare the young generations to face the changes that crisscross all aspects of economic and social life and, especially, those pertaining to work activities (APST, 1991). This would simultaneously imply in answering another inevitable question: what means do university students themselves have to face such new issues? (APST, 1991).

The relationships - very indirect or conceived in a narrow, formal, partial, and instrumental manner - between university students and the economic and social activities would be at the base of this discomfort. Such discomfort would lead the collaboration among these social actors to be rethought, putting

some of the resources that might be available at the university to the test, by means of a non-mutilating approach of the work situations and of the diversified experiences waiting for the formalization/conceptualization of the said mutations by employees belonging to varied professional sectors (APST, 1991).

At the time, as part of their militant engagement, the three researchers sought to understand the relationships between the world of culture, education and that of work. And the issues that guided their research required an approach to the reality of work. To these researchers, alternating between periods of education and work at the company brought about obstacles to a fruitful coordination between these two worlds, becoming a social, pedagogical, and philosophical problem. According to Schwartz (1985), the approximation of the places reinforced, little by little, the hypothesis of the existence of forms of culture, of accumulation of assets that blend poorly with the concept of traditional vocational training and general training. To the author, Taylorist and mass production organizations witnessed a partial decline in Europe in the early 1980's. This would represent a challenge to understand the changes arising from work, analyzing the collective knowledge and connections, values, contradictions, struggles, and the elements that are not subject to abrupt changes.

The first collaboration experience between researchers and workers consisted of a vocational training and continuing education internship called "Professional culture, know-how and technological change." The

main activity under it was a 160-hour continuing education internship for 15 employees, within the possibilities offered by the French Law of Continuing Education. This first experiment is reported in the collective work titled *L'Homme Producteur*¹, and its institutionalization gave rise to the University Diploma (UD) in APST - this course was opened especially to workers without a college or high school degree. Several socio-professional organizations were contacted to integrate and promote this unique experience, including: the Confédération Générale Du Travail (CGT) and the Union Départementale des Mutuelles des Travailleurs (UDMT). From this first experience came the APST University Diploma, in 1986, and the APST Diploma of Deepened Higher Studies, in 1989. Furthermore, the Association for the Advancement of Interdisciplinary Research on Work (Aprit) was also created in 1987.

The Diploma of Higher Specialized Studies (DESS) was instituted in 1989 to meet the needs of students of various areas of human sciences and of employees in continuous training and without college degrees. It is in this context that, between 1986 and 87, the APST device emerged, connected to the Center for Comparative Epistemology, created by professor Granger, at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Provence, France. The Department of Ergology has restructured its courses pursuant to the European standards for the reform of Higher Education and went on to offer the Master's Degree in Ergology - APST. In 1995, the research center connected to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) was called the Center for Epistemology and Comparative Ergology (Ceperc) to better integrate the contribution made by ergology.

In these twenty years, the Department of Ergology made many interventions and developed research based on agreements made with various public and private corporate partners. To this end, the department had a permanent partnership with Aprit, a nonprofit association, and also with the Observatoire des Rencontres du Travail (ORT) which was aimed at undertaking training interventions, research and other projects in the world of work.²

The general objectives of the Department of Ergology include promoting a horizontal approach in order to understand the means of work in their entirety; developing intervention tools aimed at the reorganization and management of work and, thus, promoting efficiency, quality and above all, improved working conditions; and driving a theoretical-practical framework to discuss work and the transformations that are underway in all professional activities. These objectives are implemented by means of interchangeable research, education and social intervention activities in an exchange of knowledge between academics (researchers and students) and employees of various economic sectors. The department's work takes place

by stimulating a group that is attentive to the epistemological implications of producing knowledge in several scientific fields, maintaining the confrontation with the always unique experience of individual and collective work, with critical appropriation of the knowledge available about the human work.

The history of collaboration with Brazilian researchers has several 'beginnings' because, at different times, researchers from different areas came into contact with the ergology approach to work. But it is worth recalling, for its impact, Professor Yves Schwartz's first visit in 1997, at the invitation of Professor Maria Inês Rosa, from the College of Education at the University of Campinas (Unicamp) and with funding from the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq). Thus, this supplement of *Work, education and health and other possible: dialogs in the perspective of ergology* is but a first attempt at ballasting, a small sample of the penetration of the ergology approach in the studies on work done in various fields of research in Brazil, with support from institutes and graduate programs and assistance from several funding agencies, especially the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel (Capes), the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), and several state research foundations, such as the Minas Gerais State Research Support Foundation (Fapemig), Rio de Janeiro State Research Support Foundation (Faperj), and the São Paulo State Research Support Foundation (Fapesp), among others.

Various instruments of cooperation with the Department of Ergology have been signed since then: several research groups have sent researchers to take sandwich PhDs and postdocs in the city of Aix-en-Provence, home of the department, many visits were made by French researchers, and publications were made in common. Events were organized here and there, bilateral agreements were signed - such as that between the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Level Personnel and the French Committee for the Evaluation of International Cooperation with Brazil (Capes-Cofecub) - and full doctorates at the Department of Ergology, among others. The memory of these meetings, already part of the 'history of ideas' about work in Brazil, will be organized more rigorously in the near future.

The 'inputs' made by Brazilian researchers in this framework are directly related to the origin, the professional backgrounds and the theoretical and methodological traditions in which they developed their research, and their discomfort over the world of ideas on human labor at a time of significant socioeconomic and cultural changes in a country that has not universalized basic social rights.

And what are we doing with the openings that this theoretical and methodological framework affords? This issue of *Trabalho, Educação e Saúde* presents part of what has been produced, revisiting many and di-

verse fields of research - education and professional training, management, health in various work settings (NICU, Service, Mobile Emergency Care, Family Health, Research Institute), telemarketing, the oil industry, communications - and mobilizing various fields, such as production engineering, ergonomics, communications, education, health sciences, social work... Interestingly, although we did not plan this, specific disciplines of the larger field of the so-called human sciences - history, sociology - are not addressed in this supplement, rather 'fields' that are, for ontological reasons, in tense and permanent dialogue with them and which they can clarify, through their concepts, on the experience of work in the current society. One exception is worth remembering: linguistics, which was the subject of a Capes-Cofecub agreement. Furthermore, these are fields that are more like the *carrefour* of various sciences and are in pursuit of their objects, epistemological principles, and specific theoretical and methodological frameworks. While, on the one hand, these fields cannot do without these 'master' subjects, on the other they are in tense interaction with them in that their conceptual tools do not allow the complexity of human labor to be understood.

Another curious aspect is the presence of several research groups registered at CNPq and linked to several graduate programs: Center for Studies on Work and Education (Nete/FaE/UFMG), Center for Studies in Innovation, Knowledge, and Work (Neict/UFF), Actividade Group – Ergology and labor workshops (PPGPS/Uerj), Research and Intervention in Labor, Health, and Gender Relations Activities (Pistas) (Cesteh/Ensp/Fiocruz), Center for Studies and Research in Subjectivity and Politics (Nepesp/CCHN/Ufes), Communication and Labor Research Group, CNPq/ECA-USP, Education, Labor and Knowledge Research Group, Ergology, Work, and Development Study Group, among others the authors did not mention.

The fact that the articles are, in most cases, collective, combining senior researchers-advisors and young researchers with master's and doctoral research, reveals that if it is not the case to speak of a theoretical 'school,' this theoretical and methodological framework is consolidating and initiating new generations of researchers who seek to track what is happening in the contemporary experience of work from a more clinical, micro-political perspective.

The concepts of the ergology approach unveil a sociocultural time marked by a crisis of employment, by the insecurity in such relationships, dilemmas in professional training, new and old injuries and illnesses, suggesting, paradoxically, the forms of resistance, transgression, reinvention of the labor means and of the *modus operandi* in focus. We work with the assumption that the direct consequence of this phenomenon is its impact on the ways of thinking about work, requiring approaches that consider the subject-object relationship in a concrete perspective of the work done 'here

and now,' work embodied in a 'subject' that is historically and culturally situated. In this sense, it is interesting to note the urgency of the universal-singular coordination rather than the more general cuts dear to sociology (of work, among others) at intersections with gender, ethnicity and generations. Would it be a simple lack of contributions in this sense? Or is it an approach that leads to more clinical aspects of human activity, in which the universal dimensions of this action are in focus, even if having to capture them in the socio-cultural universe they are in, revealing their knowledge and values? In this case, what would seem to be a deficiency would reveal to be the strength of the ergology approach: discerning connections between management levels and criteria - because working is managing macro variables in terms of possibilities that open up in everyday work situations, moving dialectically between macro and micro. Thus, the articles that make up this supplement reveal the routes through which we approach ergology, by adopting its specific concepts that allow for finer, more comfortable readings of issues and discomforts that we run on to in the pursuit of our reflections on what is changing and/or remaining in human labor.

Also interesting are the many links among work-education-health in various settings where the research is conducted. The similarities of the issues involving health services and education in Brazil are worthy of note: would this be related to histories and general conditions under which these services are carried out in our country? Or perhaps to the very nature of the services, which, incidentally, are also related to communications in this supplement...

But this connection proves to be fruitful in another sense. When thought of *in situ*, in the heart of the work situations, in the most minute 'industrious' activities, this reveals human action anchored on the very processes of the struggle for health in the relation with the medium - always unfaithful, backed in new forms of *savoir-faire* and generating new potential in the gaps in the standards. The key triangle to the ergologic knowledge-activity-value approach anchors its most fertile source in this.

And this is the triangle that is always present in the work situations of any and all work processes that require more democratic forms of research and management. Here there is a requirement to frequent the field and assemble devices aimed to build knowledge about work. A dual requirement arises for the latter: multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary dialogue and, also, the permanent confrontation to the test the activity. So, it is quite common for the research 'subjects' to be presented in first person (plural and/or singular), revealing the intricacies of the activity in focus. Every difficulty in 'penetrating' the field is also associated with the exposure of the agents and of the folds of reality that they have to manage and the way they manage them. From these anthropological incursions in the

field of contemporary work situations come many new questions regarding the vocational training policies, as well as the challenge to intervene to transform in the investigated work situations.

All that remains is to inquire what directions the study will take in the wake of the prospects brought about by the ergology approach to work on Brazilian soil. And, naturally, that course the ergology approach to work will take in the wake of this encounter with the Brazilian research experience and tradition.

It is important to emphasize the foreign contributions received for this supplement. From Schwartz himself, discussing the concept of work; from Louis Durrive and the reflection on the human activity as intellectual and vital; from Nouroudine, about the changing labor world and the method to approach it; and, finally, from Fyad, presenting ergology in Algeria.

Also, we would like to thank everyone who participated directly or indirectly in this project. We thank the editors of *Trabalho, Educação e Saúde* for embracing what at first was just an idea and for accompanying us throughout the process, attentively and competently in order to make it possible; the Graduate Program in Public Health of Escola Nacional de Saúde Pública Sergio Arouca, Fundação Oswaldo Cruz (Ensp/Fiocruz), which supported yet another academic initiative and which, in its upwards of 30 years of existence, has made an irrefutable contribution to training highly qualified masters and doctors to strengthen the National Health System (SUS); and, especially, all partners, researchers, professors and students who promptly and generously responded to the call to help build this work. Finally, we thank Professor Yves Schwartz for the opportunity to reflect with us on the directions of work in contemporary society and for inspiring us to, aware of it, transform it in the search for a fairer, more equitable society.

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Notes

¹ In addition to the individual publications, the team of researchers from the Department of Ergology published several collective works in French in which they present and systematize the ergology approach, such as: *L'Homme Producteur*, Paris: Messidor/Éditions Sociales, 1997; *Reconnaissances du Travail – Pour une approche ergologique*, Paris: PUF, 1998; *Travail et Ergologie*, Toulouse: Octarés Editions, 2003; *L'Activité en Dialogues*. Toulouse: Octarés Éditions, 2009, all directed by prof. Yves Schwartz, the latter two organized in partnership with Louis Durrive. Additionally, they published, in cooperation with Brazil, the work titled *Linguagem e trabalho: construção de objetos, análise no Brasil e na França*, Daniel Faïta and Cecília Pérez Souza e Silva (Orgs.), São Paulo: Cortez, 2002, and, also, Yves Schwartz and Louis Durrive's work, organized and published in Brazil Athayde, M. and Brito, J. (2007): *Trabalho e ergologia: conversas sobre a atividade humana*. Niterói: EdUFF (Original published in 2003).

² In addition to this insertion into the French territory, the department collaborates with research groups from other countries, such as Italy, Portugal, Algeria, and Mozambique. After 1997, when Yves Schwartz traveled to Brazil for the first time as the scientific coordinator of the department, cooperation with researchers, research groups of several Brazilian public and private universities and institutions (UFMG, Uerj, UFF, PUC-SP, PUC-RJ, PUC-Minas, UNA, UFPB, UFU, UFG, USP, Unicamp, UFPE, UFMT, Ufes, UFRJ, UnB, and Fiocruz, among others) has increased in several areas of knowledge (Linguistics, Education, Ergonomics/Engineering, Collective Health, History, Sociology, Social Communications, and Psychology).

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