

## (De)Valuation of teachers in Brazilian basic education: the naturalization of precariousness promoted by teacher awards

### *(Des)Valorização docente na educação básica brasileira: naturalização da precarização promovida pelas premiações de professores*

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#### ABSTRACT

The research investigates the concept of teacher success disseminated by the *Educador Nota 10* awards, discussing the implications of their perception of success for the recognition of the work performed by this occupational category. Using authors such as Dardot and Laval and Montaña, the study is based on a content analysis of the summaries published by the contest about the winning projects in ten editions, and discusses the conceptions promoted by it to reward teachers and, thus, impose its criteria for recognition. This is a qualitative, documentary study, which identifies entrepreneurship, competition, and meritocracy as concepts that define success in the awards. The dissemination of these elements by the awards contributes to the assimilation of precariousness in teaching work by promoting the perception that the teacher could individually overcome difficulties and achieve their goals, waiving their rights and having their recognition limited to individual and temporary rewards.

*Keywords:* Public policies of education. Teaching work conditions. Professional success. Teaching recognition.

#### RESUMO

A pesquisa investiga a concepção de êxito docente divulgada pelo Prêmio Educador Nota 10, discutindo as implicações de sua percepção particular de sucesso para a valorização do trabalho

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exercido por essa categoria profissional. Utilizando autores como Dardot e Laval e Montaña, o estudo se ampara em uma análise de conteúdo de sínteses divulgadas pelo concurso acerca dos projetos vencedores em dez edições, e discute as concepções frisadas por ele para premiar os professores e, com isso, imputar seus critérios de valorização. O estudo, qualitativo e documental, identifica o empreendedorismo, a concorrência e a meritocracia como definidores do êxito na premiação. A disseminação desses elementos pelo Prêmio colabora com a naturalização da precariedade no trabalho docente ao promover a percepção de que o professor, individualmente, superaria dificuldades e alcançaria seus objetivos, prescindindo de direitos e restringindo a valorização a bonificações individuais e provisórias.

*Palavras-chave:* Políticas públicas em educação. Condições de trabalho docente. Êxito profissional. Valorização docente.

## Initial considerations

Different dimensions can guide the discussion about the recognition of teachers. In the symbolic scope, the achievement of social recognition and status can be the way to analyze what appears in teachers' speeches as one of their main goals. In the scope of rights, salary issues and legal guarantees in the career (in its complex materializations) allow for the approach of other perspectives. This article, however, addresses a different manner of valuing these professionals, which has been discreetly and intensely popularized in countries such as Brazil: the one disseminated by teacher awards.

The study focuses on the *Educador Nota 10* (Outstanding Educator, in Portuguese) awards, which have been promoted since 1998 and are aimed at basic education teachers. The contest, which claims its goal is to recognize and value this professional group, awards certificates, gift cards, and the title of Educator of the Year to those who, among the applicants, achieve the best results in the selection. Widely advertised by a network of media vehicles that includes the Globo and Abril groups and the *Nova Escola* (New School, in Portuguese) magazine, the contest has popularity and legitimacy among the category, which justifies its choice as the object of this research (PRÊMIO EDUCADOR NOTA 10, 2022).

Therefore, the aim is to understand the conception of teacher success promoted by these awards, discussing the implications of their perception of success in teaching for the recognition of the work performed by this occupational category. To this end, content analysis (BARDIN, 2016) is performed on the summaries of winning projects of the awards in ten editions in order to identify which indicators are predominant, composing the data that support the construction of the debate. This is a qualitative, documentary study, which uses a critical theoretical framework and includes the content of the contest's proposal to support the discussion. Based on the analytical categories established, the purpose is to elaborate the hypothesis that the perception of success

promoted favors the assimilation of precariousness in teaching work, as it imposes recognition based on individualistic criteria related to the market and competition rationales with which the individuals who promote the awards identify themselves.

## **The conception of teacher success promoted by the *Educador Nota 10* awards**

For more than 20 years the *Educador Nota 10* awards have been organized by the Victor Civita Foundation. Promoting annual editions, the initiative has gathered different partners over time, and since 2014 the Roberto Marinho Foundation, Globo, and Abril are also part of the group of promoters. Supporters and funders are updated every year, with the regular presence of entities such as Nova Escola magazine, Lemann Foundation, Undime (National Union of County Offices of Education), Consed (National Council of Education Secretaries), and the Natura Institute. These entities support the contest, which in its successive editions hands out certificates, gift cards, and the title of Educator of the Year<sup>1</sup> with the aim of recognizing and valuing teachers, according to the information it publishes. In order to participate, teachers send in reports of their practices and go through different evaluation stages that result in 50 finalists, 10 of whom are nominated as winners and take part in an awards ceremony in São Paulo, usually in October, where the outstanding educator is revealed.

The website pages of the *Educador Nota 10* awards, which present the content of their proposal and in which there are summaries of the reports sent<sup>2</sup> by the winning teachers<sup>3</sup> about the projects developed by them in their schools, make up the corpus of this study. Documents like these, more than expressing objectives and describing practices, are sources of research because they articulate interests, propose policies, and create social interventions (EVANGELISTA, 2012). The perceptions addressed

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<sup>1</sup> The finalists are awarded (as set out in the regulation) with a digital subscription to the Nova Escola magazine and a finalist certificate; the winners, in addition to the digital subscription to the Nova Escola magazine and the certificate, receive also a winner certificate and a R\$15,000.00 gift card. The Educator of the Year, in addition to the awards already received in the other stages, wins another certificate (for obtaining the highest position assigned by the contest) and a R\$15,000.00 gift card.

<sup>2</sup> The reports that were originally sent by the teachers are not disclosed, but brief descriptions (with around ten lines) provided by the contest itself. Thus, when content analysis is carried out, the teachers who formulated the projects are not being judged, but the way in which the contest appropriates the pedagogical practices and what it promotes as successful based on its own conceptions.

<sup>3</sup> Teachers who work directly in the classroom and in management positions can send descriptions of their projects to the contest.

function as a communication channel with those interested in the contest, but they are also used by the political network<sup>4</sup> that sponsors the contest to promote it, sharing and emphasizing its particular conception of teacher success, which denotes their centrality for the purposes of this study.

The summaries of the awarded projects, for example, are replicated by the media, giving rise to special reports, especially if the awarded teachers are from an area where there is an affiliate of the radio and television stations linked to the awards. The *Nova Escola* magazine, in turn, usually publishes a special edition only with the ten annual winners, illustrated with photos and interviews with those involved and also including students and their families. Brief systematizations of each of these practices are accessible both on the awards' website and on the Victor Civita Foundation's website, and these are the descriptions that will be used in the content analysis (BARDIN, 2016) in order to achieve the study objective.

It is worth mentioning that the contest explicitly stipulates the selection criteria, which are indicated as offering evidence of learning, enabling the replication of the project in other realities regardless of their conditions, being inclusive, using updated methodologies, and following the national basic curriculum. Although these elements may bring indications, they are considered too broad for the thorough understanding of the aspects that define the "outstanding educator", therefore, we chose to analyze the summaries of the winning projects, in a time frame of ten editions (2010-2019). This period was selected as it was considered sufficient for identifying the perception of success emphasized by the contest, and because it contemplates the excerpts still available online. It should be noted that more recent events were not included because of the contest's adaptations to the Covid-19 pandemic, which changed school procedures as of 2020.

Around 100 summaries<sup>5</sup> were thus submitted to content analysis, which was chosen as a methodological instrument for articulating the surface of the texts selected for the study and the factors that determined these characteristics. Considered as a set of methods for communication analysis that uses systematic and objective procedures to describe the content of messages, content analysis is understood as an interpretation effort that oscillates between the rigor of objectivity and the fecundity of subjectivity (BARDIN, 2016). By identifying the presence, recurrence or even absence of significant

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<sup>4</sup> Political networks, according to Ball (2014), are communities formed by subjects other than traditional ones who act in the direction or execution of policies, sharing convergent ideas regarding social problems and their resolutions based on their experience in the market.

<sup>5</sup> Until 2011, two major winners were chosen: Educator of the Year and Outstanding Manager, and 11 summaries of these editions were analyzed; in 2014, only nine winners were announced on the contest's website. This explains why the number of texts analyzed was not exactly 100, even though the logic of the contest is to award ten winners in each edition.

terms or topics, it is based on a movement of description, inference and interpretation of messages.

Following Bardin's (2016) recommendations, after skimming the available materials about the awards, the choice of documents and the formulation of hypotheses and objectives were carried out, as previously explained. The content analysis of the syntheses contemplated in the period established was then carried out, which resulted in the identification of ten analytical indicators (meaning units) that, since this is a qualitative study, represent cores of meaning that comprise the essence of the reports and demonstrate what the awards consider as elementary to teacher success. According to the author, a theme is the meaning unit that is naturally released from a text and that supports the understanding of trends, motivations, values, and even attitudes.

Thus, in the application of the method, these indicators were detached from the descriptions made by the magazine about the winning teaching practices, and, for this study, a systematization of their meanings is offered below. It is therefore understood that the analysis becomes clearer, making the discussion in the following sections coherent. It should be mentioned that these meanings were elaborated by the authors based on the analysis of the aforementioned documents, and do not necessarily represent the same content as a dictionary, for example.

CHART 1 – Analytical indicators or meaning units comprised in the syntheses of the winning projects of the Educator Nota 10 awards between 2010 and 2019 and their meanings

Analytical indicators		Meanings
1	Increased scores in external evaluations	Identified specifically in school management proposals, this element is portrayed as a distinctive feature of the awardee for indicating what the contest considers as the materialization of quality improvement in education.
2	Collectivity/Cooperation	The stages of the awarded projects promote collectivity, so that the students cooperate with each other in solving problems that are presented or perceived in reality.
3	Students' curiosity/ interests	The teacher's sensibility in perceiving what the students' curiosities or interests are and competence in proposing practices articulated with them, which would make school experiences enjoyable.

4	Family/school community involvement	The school community is emphasized as co-responsible for the projects developed, having its particularities or knowledge considered in the analyses that precede the elaboration of the proposal, in the development of the activities and/or in the work assessment.
5	Varied methodological strategies and/or diverse materials	Diverse methodological strategies, materials and, specially, information and communication technologies and/or social media are prominent in the winning projects. These resources are related to the teacher's effort to ensure that students, in their different ways of learning, are included in the proposals.
6	Innovation	This element is emphasized in the practices as a way to recreate them, updating the traditional proposals and acknowledging the authorship of the teacher who proposes it.
7	Students' needs	The teacher's perception of the group's needs is described as a mobilizing factor for the practices, in relation to both knowledge and attitudinal issues.
8	Protagonism	This element is demonstrated in projects that stimulate students to solve problems through school practices, encouraging them to assume a position of responsibility. Complex social issues (such as violence, the lack of basic sanitation in the community, or the school's structures) are associated with the possibility of resolution through specific and individual actions by the subjects or by small local groups.
9	Emotional, social, and behavioral issues	The proposals are indicated as a way to help in the development of attitudes, values and behaviors that are considered socially appropriate, such as issues of self-esteem, combating prejudice, and encouraging empathetic attitudes.
10	Relation between school knowledge and everyday life	Proposing tasks in which school knowledge is more easily understood in its relationship with the group's daily life, associating scientific knowledge with experiences in the family or community.

SOURCE: Developed by the authors.

With the indicators found, set against the theoretical framework of the research and the context of the awards, three analytical categories are inferred that systematize the winning proposals and, consequently, the way in which teacher success is perceived in the contest. Although these categories have different concepts, they complement each other, which will be noticed in the following sections, where the interpretation is explained for the final stage of content analysis. The indicators above will be readdressed along the text, as well as some of the summaries of awarded projects, in order to illustrate this argument.

## **Entrepreneurism as an element of teacher success in basic education**

In the development of this analysis, it was possible to notice a sequence of indicators used by many of the winning teachers that synthesizes a particular movement: the teacher identifies a learning need among the students, an interest or curiosity in the class and, from that, uses different materials and methodological strategies, associates knowledge with everyday life, and creates an innovative activity (meaning units 7, 3, 5, 10, and 6, respectively). This educational path is peculiar in classrooms, but in the summaries published by the contest it is linked to the distinctive ability of the winning teacher to believe in the proposal, to not get discouraged in the face of complex difficulties, and to find different answers to everyday problems in order to overcome them.

The difficulties experienced by teachers are not ignored by the contest, which emphasizes the lack of structure, resources, and materials in schools across the country in the excerpts included in the analysis. However, this study highlights the strategies created by teachers to overcome them and achieve success in their pedagogical practice, favoring the students' learning. Crisis situations and obstacles are shown as common in the school routine, and the professionals awarded are those who, instead of getting discouraged, create ways to solve them, even if they need to collect recyclable materials or mobilize donations from the community. Such potential for organization and achievement amid crises can be related to entrepreneurship, a thematic field that has been promoted not only in business relationships, but in all social relations.

This is because in neoliberalism there is an accountable and financial subjectivation (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2014), in which the enterprise is promoted as a model of subjectivation, and "everyone is an enterprise to be managed and a capital to be made to bear fruit" (p. 302). Believing in their potential, the awarded teacher-entrepreneur is portrayed as one who is not shaken by the difficulties encountered in their daily practice and takes individual responsibility for solving any problem, however complex it may be. Innovating and persisting, they use difficulties to create strategies and get the results they need, as in the project "Filtering the tears of Rio Doce", awarded in 2016 and included in the *corpus* of this analysis.

In the project, a teacher and his students studied the periodic table to identify

problems in the community's water (supplied by a river contaminated by the collapse of the Fundão tailings dam in Mariana, Minas Gerais, in 2015) and formed partnerships to provide filters for local residents, solving a community problem through the teacher's initiative that mobilized local solidarity. In the same project, the sequence of indicators mentioned at the beginning of this section is ratified, underscoring the teacher's expertise in planning and executing an action that overcame an initial problem and showed results that exceeded those expected for student learning, which is—remarkably—worthy of recognition in this teacher's practice.

However, the relevance attributed to these results, which are similar in several other syntheses that were also awarded in the investigated period, reinforces the link between the contest and perceptions that promote entrepreneurship as a solution to societal problems. This occurs when responsibilities are assigned to the individual sphere and at the local level, with the subjects and their immediate partners being charged with the transformation of any adversities, even if historical. According to Montaña (2010), this is related to a change in the pattern of response to societal problems imposed by neoliberalism, in which the shrunken state, an unburdened capital and the accountability of the individual and the local community are understood as guiding attitudes of sociability. A new social contract suggests that social solidarity and the universality of rights and services should be replaced by local solidarity, self-help and mutual aid (MONTAÑO, 2010), with the third sector having centrality in the direction and execution of social policies, which include education.

Protagonism, which is another indicator of analysis (number 8) that stands out in the example above and in other descriptions, corroborates this understanding and the definition of entrepreneurship as a thematic field that comprises success in teaching work. As it promotes the perception that each person should *make it happen*, regardless of their occupation or social space, without delegating the task of providing resources or producing solutions for educational (and social) problems to the state or any other entity, the contest spreads the view that teachers, by taking responsibility for the difficulties they encounter, *roll up their sleeves* and *make a difference*—terms stressed in the summaries.

In these descriptions sent to the awards, the teacher is associated with the rationality of a “unitary subject” (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 260): “the subject of total self-involvement” who, driven by the desire to accomplish, understands oneself as the only one responsible for projects to succeed. Satisfying a kind of “imperious order of his own desire, which there is no question of resisting” (p. 260), the entrepreneur “is not afraid to swim against the current: he creates, disrupts, shatters the ordinary course of things” (p. 118) and understands crises as a possibility to make changes and show his creative and resilient potential. The teacher is presented by the awards from this perspective, being indicated as one who stands against whatever problems and limitations, using the entrepreneurial drive to put their potential into practice and

achieve success in their goals.

Furthermore, entrepreneurship stands out in how the awards' regulations present the evaluation steps that the teachers undergo when applying for the position of Educator of the Year. Different moments, which are conducted by several professionals, are used to evaluate the reports submitted by the teachers regarding the validity of the evidence, which should demonstrate the project's quality, potential for fulfillment and ability to overcome the challenges proposed. The enrolled teachers can be requested, by phone, to answer questions from the evaluation commission, as well as to submit complementary materials that prove their effectiveness, being repeatedly tested. The teachers need to prove that their proposal submitted to the *Educador Nota 10* awards, in addition to standing out among that of other teachers, has verifiable results, is inspirational, and can be disseminated as a good practice, since replication of the winning projects is a requirement even for their selection.

The replication in other contexts can also be related to the business landscape, where success stories are used to motivate other entrepreneurs. As neoliberalism claims, in a market where everyone supposedly competes freely and in a certain level playing field, if a few individuals take risks, create opportunities and succeed, then everyone else could have the same results. In the awards, all teachers—whether they are in management positions or not, working in any level or modality of basic education, in different subjects, in public or private and philanthropic schools—are considered eligible to be awarded the title of Educator of the Year, thus being understood as in equal conditions to undertake new projects and achieve their goals.

When the contest explains that the proposals submitted should be able to be reproduced in any physical or material conditions, there is also an approximation with the perception mentioned above, since, once again, entrepreneurial ability is seen as capable of overcoming contextual limitations. The role of the state in supporting and providing minimum working conditions for teachers is not indicated as a factor that can be related to teacher success in the awards. On the contrary, the professionals' enthusiasm and motivation to innovate and overcome the challenges of their practice are considered crucial for the success of their projects, which would not depend, as in the free market, on predetermined conditions.

Along these lines, an optimistic atmosphere is important for entrepreneurship. As Harvey (2014) points out, the belief that any enterprise can succeed helps people to believe in themselves and take risks, which is a way to motivate subjects to undertake new projects. This emphasizes the understanding expressed above, since in the awards, the teachers, regardless of their bonds and structural conditions, are understood as potential entrepreneurs—not of businesses, but of successful educational practices that serve as good examples to other professionals. This perspective is complemented by the other analytical categories, presented in the following sections, and which create an overview of how quality teaching work is understood by the proposal.

## **Generalized competition as one of the foundations of the Educador Nota 10 awards**

The indicators of analysis identified in the awards also associate competition with entrepreneurship as a condition for success in teaching. This thematic field is intrinsic to awards in general and stands out in the contest's proposal by promoting competition among teachers in the search for recognition, which is restricted to receiving gifts and the title awarded to the professional who shows the most potential during the evaluation process. Moreover, on the website of the awards, this category is considered structural to the initiative based on the perception that, by competing among themselves, teachers would qualify their practice in order to prove their efficiency and, consequently, the educational process as a whole. This element also stands out in the summaries of awarded projects, indicating that successful work makes the results achieved by teachers surpass those of their peers, which extends to the validation of the performance of students and educational institutions.

In the indicators observed, the contest emphasizes the rise of indexes in external evaluations (the first meaning unit presented in the research), relating teacher success to the ability to obtain outstanding positions (with their class and the school) in exams applied by education departments to which the institution belongs or in nationally formulated evaluations. This conception distances pedagogical processes from human formation and, although it may not be explicitly assumed by institutions, it constitutes part of the generalized competition (LAVAL, 2019) that guides social practices and, consequently, the educational ones.

In the description released by the award of "My school: collective reconstruction", a project that stood out in 2015 for highlighting the ability of a principal to take his school out of a situation of violence and depredation, the rise in the institution's index in external evaluations is mentioned, indicating that this would be one of the advances resulting from the work carried out. Other proposals also include this indicator, such as "Managing Dreams, Achieving Goals!" from 2019, which pointed out that motivating the teachers and setting learning goals had good outcomes on such exams. This is proven with the indexes, demonstrating their rise when the initiative is developed.

Although competition does not appear explicitly in the summaries, it is indicated by the recognition given to such evaluations. For instance, the quality of the work performed in the schools becomes defined by the achievement of the evaluation's goals, the emphasis on the results obtained, and the prominence of the institution in rankings based on the published scores. There is thus a constant need for schools to be better than other schools that also take the exams and that appear in the rankings, as well as to outperform themselves. After all, the score achieved is always a reminder of a higher score to be conquered in the next edition, since the stagnation or, even worse, the decrease of the scores brings negative connotations to the schools and to

the professionals who work there, who are considered the only ones responsible for the institution's failure or success.

Competition, therefore, becomes assimilated in the school's daily routine, fostering behaviors driven by constant dispute. In an institution that adopts practices similar to those of an enterprise (LAVAL, 2019), success is measurable in numbers, and external evaluations provide this indication, which becomes significant when an institution achieves an outstanding position among the others. Goals are gradually increased, establishing a continuous movement in which competition does not cease. On the contrary, the school (and its professionals) could only remain attractive to its clients with the permanent vigilance regarding its results and those of its competitors. And this rationale seems to be close to the one stressed in the summaries elaborated by the contest based on the practices it selects.

Inequality among schools becomes a common fact, leading to the perception that some teachers are better than others. Thus, the occupational category itself gets divided, which is reinforced by the requirement of the *Educador Nota 10* awards for the projects to be replicable in any material, physical and regional conditions, emphasizing that some professionals are able to create and innovate, while others should only replicate the proposals that had their effectiveness validated. Those with the best evaluations guide the work of the others, ignoring the diversity and complexity of school contexts and endorsing the perception that only teachers are responsible for the school's success.

Another indicator that associates competition with teacher success is the one that encourages parents or guardians to actively participate (fourth meaning unit) in the selection of relevant themes for class, in the stages of pedagogical work planned by the teacher, and in the evaluation of practices developed. As neoliberal rationality understands schools as objects of consumption (LAVAL, 2019) among which families can choose, including them in pedagogical decisions brings educational institutions closer to the family's expectations, making them competitive with others. It thus promotes a continuous proof of quality of the practices developed and ensures that the school remains the parents' choice. Also, this does not just involve private schools but also public and philanthropic ones, whose funding depends on their number of enrollments, which fosters the generalized competition mentioned by Laval (2019).

It's not that families should not join the educational process: on the contrary, this is one of the actions most expected by teachers. However, this rationale promoted by the awards is similar to that of external evaluations, in which instead of monitoring the development of each student according to their learning needs and possibilities, there is only one final indicator to be evaluated. It is as though the school were rendering accounts, presenting results and proving its quality in search of the consent of parents and guardians. Consequently, the school remains attractive to them in a market that competes for the filling of places by new students.

Since neoliberalism understands competition as a guarantee of free initiative of

individuals, with its competitive advantages improving consumption and the social dynamics (HARVEY, 2005), competing is considered as a way to qualify entrepreneurial action. After all, for individuals to stand out in a field of constant competition, not *only* they need to create answers to the problems they face, but to do so in a more competent way than their peers. This perspective is illustrated by the awards under analysis, in which only the teachers who submit to the competition's rules and manage to stand out from their colleagues—subjecting themselves to competition with their peers and to the rigorous evaluation stages—can be recognized. This argument will be developed below, with the explanation of the third analytical category found: meritocracy.

### **Teacher's merit as a form of accountability and an element of teacher success**

Complementing the two thematic fields identified, meritocracy is the third analytical category that stands out in this study, and it can be considered essential to contests, similarly to the element discussed above. After all, the idea of rewarding and giving prominence to one professional—or a small group thereof—contains the perception that some would be more dedicated and have a distinct performance than others, deserving a particular recognition. In the *Educador Nota 10* awards, teachers need to prove their merit to stand out and reach prominent positions when competing (since the analytical categories, although representing different concepts, are related). Only then do they receive the gifts and titles promised by the contest and have their project publicized in reports from the political network that promotes the contest.

The content of the proposal indicates this understanding in several moments, emphasizing that only a few contestants become finalists and winners, and only one of them is considered the Educator of the Year in each edition. This depends on the relevance of the project submitted to the competition, but also on the teachers' ability to prove their competence and to demonstrate the effort put in to make the project have good results. Benefits are not understood as being universally distributable; they are limited to rewards that reflect the neoliberal rationality that states that justice is “the just recompense of merit” (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 36) and, therefore, those considered less dedicated or who do not reflect expected results do not deserve retribution. Contextual issues are again not deemed relevant, and the disparity between the educational conditions to which teachers and students have access are perceived as commonplace.

This perception is strengthened in the identified meaning units, and protagonism (eighth indicator listed) also emphasizes meritocracy, which has been mentioned above regarding how entrepreneurship guides the conception of teacher success in the awards. In the summaries of the winning projects, a preconceived idea can be observed, in which the subjects could overcome the problems they encounter by taking a pro-active stance

and, as a result, they receive the recognition they deserve for their effort. The merit in a significant part of the analyzed reports is that the teachers do not depend on external help and, even when facing an obstacle that surpasses their field of action, they create methods and seek partnerships to solve it locally, such as in “Filtering the tears of Rio Doce”, an initiative already mentioned that reaffirms the proposition under discussion.

It is also in this direction that cooperation and collectivity are understood, as well as the recognition given by the awards to projects that are dedicated to the development of emotional, social, and behavioral issues (second and ninth meaning units, respectively). Although concerns with social and emotional aspects have been related to the proposition of the national basic curriculum recently, they had already stood out in the awarded proposals of previous years. In addition to reinforcing neoliberal principles, they are linked to a neoconservative trend from the last two decades, in which individualism is added to morality, building a particular framework based on which education is constituted and redefining the criteria for the evaluation of teaching work.

This relationship is indicated because, as it was possible to identify in the analyzed summaries, more than union and the creation of bonds, collectivity and cooperation (which are essentially different from the incentive to competition present in the contest) are promoted by the awards as a way for students to autonomously solve problems brought by the teachers or perceived in everyday life. Mutual help, in addition to values such as tolerance, respect, avoidance of conflicts and conciliation are understood as moral constructs that improve the teacher’s work. More than just teaching school content, the teacher is thus charged with the task of making the students aware of socially acceptable behaviors and of their position of responsibility before the world. It is not as though addressing these issues in class is essentially negative. However, in a society that assimilates social injustice and does not question the bases that sustain it, the pattern of acceptance of the conditions that are imposed on individuals is a conciliatory perspective, which perceives inequality with acquiescence in a romanticized conception of education.

As mentioned earlier, Montaña (2010) states that the encouragement for subjects to take accountability and unite with their immediate partners to mitigate the problems of reality is intrinsic to the response pattern of social services that is demanded by neoliberalism. The constant incentive for society to be an agent of the changes it expects dismisses the state from providing universal support programs for citizens, whilst also distancing the market from any mitigating action regarding the effects of its exploitation. With subjects being made aware of their role as managers of their own lives, they are encouraged to collaborate with each other when their isolated efforts are not enough, in initiatives where local solidarity and mutual aid would meet the demands and exalt their benevolent qualities.

The effort of teachers to promote different strategies, provide multiple materials and resources and propose different methodologies (fifth indicator) to guarantee the students’

learning also points to the relationship between the meaning units found and reaffirms meritocracy as an analytical category. In the synthesis of “I’m the one who writes!”, the need for 5th grade students to write better made the teacher develop different reviewing activities in order to improve their writing. Everything was documented in a blog, which motivated the students and provided the family with access to the activities developed. In “Natural disaster: informing to prevent”, the teacher used multiple strategies and materials (research in several bibliographic references, videos, seminars, analysis of maps and charts, and letter writing) for the students to recognize signs of a natural disaster.

The teachers’ effort is portrayed by the contest as the ability to strive in the face of difficulties encountered, but mainly as the dedication—a unique and commendable characteristic that should be replicated by their peers—in their work. The constant presence of this element in the awarded proposals shows that the *outstanding educator* seeks to surpass triviality and is dedicated to engaging students in the teaching-learning process, overcoming barriers that may hinder the students’ development with determination, creativity, and knowledge. Along with the other thematic fields, the teacher’s dedication in daily practice is one of the points emphasized by the awards and contributes to a particular conformation regarding teacher success.

### ***Educador Nota 10* awards: the assimilation of precariousness in teaching work as a condition for recognition**

In order to grant the recognition it claims to aim for, the contest analyzed in this study is articulated with three criteria: entrepreneurship, competition, and meritocracy. The *outstanding educators* are announced as the only ones responsible for the success of teaching practices, and those who managed to succeed in the competition are indicated as examples of the possibility to make education *work* and have *good* results—at least based on the conceptions endorsed by the contest through the collective subjects that promote it. The teachers’ drive to create and perform fruitful actions even in the midst of difficulties, their effort, commitment, and the improvement of their work inspired by the competitiveness of contests such as the awards would build a framework of professional distinction, which could justify the recognition of this select group with individual and temporary bonuses.

Guarantees for the occupational category are not mentioned as related to the teachers’ success, nor as elements that would promote their recognition. On the contrary, the teaching profile endorsed by the awards indicates that even if the teacher is temporary, with no time available for studies, planning, and evaluation, and even if the school does not have an appropriate physical and pedagogical structure, for example, they would still be able to overcome difficulties and develop good teaching practices. It is not that this does not occur in the daily routine of Brazilian basic education, but the promotion

of these professional traits by an event acknowledged by society establishes a standard of individualistic and competitive performance, which contributes to the assimilation of precariousness in teaching work.

In fact, it is possible to note the contest's omission regarding the state responsibilities in the provision of conditions for teachers to perform their practice, which can be related to the generalization of the idea that the state is in constant crisis and, therefore, could not make investments in institutions, much less provide salary increase to the civil service. After all, teachers are part of this professional body that tends to be considered inefficient, and the contest's rewards would supply the needs of that small percentage that demonstrates its prominence. The separation between economy and politics conceived by neoliberalism (CROCHICK, 2021) justifies these perceptions, favoring the former over the latter and distancing social needs from financial decisions—and this rationality is deemed insurmountable.

The concept of recognition disseminated by the contest, therefore, differs from that provided as a constitutional precept and that requires stability and career plans for progressive professional development, as well as public funding. Cordeiro and Gouveia (2021) point out that the National Education Plan (2014-2024) organized national and local agendas regarding the elements of the recognition policy, by establishing goals exclusively to address training—initial and continuous, compensation and career. However, the resources and political mobilization currently invested are not considered sufficient to achieve its goals, which could bring substantial advances in this area. The recognition of teachers, consequently, ends up being associated with initiatives such as the investigated awards, in line with the current neoliberal rationality.

Moreover, as Laval (2019) mentions, this bias contributes to the school being understood as a space for individual struggles for knowledge in search of future profitability, rather than for human, public and universal development. At the same time, it corroborates the historical apathy of ruling elites toward education. According to the author, the scarcity of resources, the lack of teachers, the overcrowded classes, whereas revealing a logic of impoverishment of public services, are also due to an old tradition of the economic and political elites, who, when it comes to the education of lower-class children, are generous in their speeches and stingy in financial resources.

This is because contests, such as the one under analysis, stimulate teachers to be competitive and prove their efficiency in their role as human capital trainers, regardless of contextual limitations. Thus, the subject's effort is understood as essential to his achievements, since inequalities would not justify social failure, with entrepreneurship (including entrepreneur of himself, with the subject being his own master for a successful life) as an alternative (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2014). From this perspective, the contest disseminates a conception of teaching that celebrates the teacher's individual success whereas assimilating their difficulties, with the content of its proposal being widely promoted and favoring the acceptance of its concepts.

In addition, the *Educador Nota 10* awards portray success as a condition for the recognition it claims to provide, which is restricted, however, to occasional and temporary gifts and titles. Professional development, career guarantees and adequate structural conditions are waived in exchange for these bonuses for the select group of professionals who prove their effectiveness, quality, and authenticity. With teachers being held accountable for finding solutions and elaborating successful projects even without basic conditions, there is an assimilation of the fragile implementation of collective guarantees and the precariousness of teaching work in basic education.

## Final considerations

The three categories in the *Educador Nota 10* awards identified as responsible for teacher success—entrepreneurism, competition, and meritocracy—disseminate the perception that teachers articulated with such elements in their practice are able to solve the complex problems of everyday life by themselves. Obstinate and hardworking, the good teacher is driven by eagerness to realize and competition, which would improve their practice and make them worthy of recognition. Without relying on state aids, adequate working conditions and a decent salary, which are not mentioned by the awards and point to a different direction from that demonstrated by the content analysis, the conception of success promoted by the awards brings implications to teaching work.

In the awards, the recognition of teaching is limited to gift cards, magazine subscriptions and certificates for a small portion of teachers, and nothing indicates how the awards could result in career gains, salary improvements or the provision of qualified infrastructure for schools. The gift cards received might even help in the purchase of supplies and equipment, but they are not enough to change the reality of educational inequality, which is shown in studies carried out in the field. The implementation of education policies that provide decent working conditions is also not a priority for the award, nor is it considered possible (since it is in line with a perspective that aims to reduce the role of the state in social services) or necessary (as a hardworking teacher would be enough).

In addition to handing out titles and gifts, the contest thus disseminates singular conceptions of a specific political network, whose societal perspective and rationality demonstrate a connection with neoliberalism. Its prescriptions are treated by the expertise of the media groups that promote the awards and disseminated under a bias that romanticizes education and teaching, while promoting their increasing precariousness. In the *Educador Nota 10* awards, these groups relate teacher success to the solution of complex educational problems, with such issues being portrayed as the teachers' personal responsibility, solvable by their entrepreneurial, meritocratic and competitive practice, even without elementary working conditions. Thus, they would promote the improvement of education, with their professional recognition being individualized,

and in a controversial bias about teaching that assimilates precariousness in awards such as the one analyzed in this study.

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