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TEACHER-STUDENT INTERACTION IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: challenges and possibilities in public education in São Paulo

INTERAÇÃO PROFESSOR-ALUNO EM ÉPOCA DE REDES SOCIAIS: desafios e possibilidades na educação pública paulista

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ABSTRACT

Digital social networks have profoundly transformed the dynamics of interaction between teachers and students, especially in public education in São Paulo. This action-research study involved 146 teachers from the state school system of São Paulo and sought to understand how these professionals perceive, experience, and reframe their pedagogical relationships amidst the intensive use of digital platforms. The investigation shows that while social networks expand possibilities for communication, closeness, and student engagement, they also pose challenges related to exposure, the boundaries between personal and professional life, and new demands for pedagogical mediation. The analysis reveals that social networks function as hybrid spaces, where educational, affective, and social dimensions intertwine, requiring teachers not only to adapt technologically but also to develop ethical and reflective sensitivity to deal with issues such as privacy, teacher authority, and the construction of bonds. Inspired by Castells' (2013) conception of the network society, the article argues that the educator's role is not limited to content transmission but also involves critical mediation of young people's communicational practices in digital environments. The results highlight the need for public policies and ongoing professional development programs to support teachers in understanding both the risks and the potential of social networks, transforming them into pedagogical tools and spaces for constructive dialogue in the teaching-learning process.

Keywords: Teacher-student interaction; Digital social networks; Public education.

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RESUMO

As redes sociais digitais transformaram profundamente a dinâmica da interação entre professores e alunos, especialmente na educação pública paulista. Este estudo, de natureza pesquisa-ação, contou com a participação de 146 docentes da rede estadual de São Paulo e buscou compreender como esses profissionais percebem, vivenciam e ressignificam suas relações pedagógicas em meio ao uso intensivo de plataformas digitais. A investigação evidencia que, se por um lado as redes sociais ampliam as possibilidades de comunicação, proximidade e engajamento dos estudantes, por outro, também impõem desafios ligados à exposição, aos limites entre vida pessoal e profissional e às novas demandas de mediação pedagógica. A análise mostra que as redes funcionam como espaços híbridos, em que se entrelaçam dimensões educativas, afetivas e sociais, exigindo do professor não apenas adaptação tecnológica, mas também sensibilidade ética e reflexiva para lidar com questões como privacidade, autoridade docente e construção de vínculos. Inspirado na concepção de sociedade em rede proposta por Castells (2013), o artigo aponta que o papel do educador não se restringe à transmissão de conteúdos, mas envolve a mediação crítica das práticas comunicacionais dos jovens em ambientes digitais. Os resultados reforçam a necessidade de políticas públicas e de formações continuadas que auxiliem os professores a compreenderem os riscos e potencialidades das redes sociais, transformando-as em instrumentos pedagógicos e em espaços de diálogo construtivo no processo de ensino-aprendizagem.

Palavras-chave: Interação professor-aluno; Redes sociais digitais; Educação pública.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, digital social networks have ceased to be merely spaces for leisure and have become means of social, cultural, and educational interaction. The relationship between teachers and students, historically mediated by the school and teaching materials, has gained new dimensions due to the massive use of digital platforms, especially among young people. This phenomenon challenges pedagogical practice and demands new forms of mediation that consider both the positive aspects and the risks of using social networks.

According to Castells (2013), we live in a "network society", in which digital communication redefines bonds, practices, and relationships. In the educational context, this logic is expressed in the way students use networks such as WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, bringing them closer to teachers in ways previously unthinkable. Thus, understanding the teacher-student interaction in this scenario is essential for rethinking pedagogical practices and the boundaries between the personal and the professional.

This article presents the results of an action research study conducted with 146 teachers from the São Paulo state public school system. The aim is to analyze how

educators perceive, experience, and redefine their interaction with students in the age of digital social networks.

2 JUSTIFICATION

The theme of teacher-student interaction has always been central to pedagogy and educational psychology. For Vygotsky (2001), the teaching-learning process is socially constructed, with interaction being the main driver of development. However, in contemporary times, this contact extends beyond the school walls and also occurs in digital environments, requiring new reflections.

The choice of teachers from the São Paulo public school system is justified by the representativeness of this network, which concentrates thousands of teachers working in different socioeconomic regions of the state. At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic accentuated the need to rethink the use of digital technologies, which have come to occupy a central role in school relations (UNESCO, 2021). Therefore, analyzing teachers' perceptions of this interaction on social networks becomes not only current but essential for critical and responsible pedagogical practice.

3 OBJECTIVES

3.1 General objective

- To analyze teacher-student interaction in the age of digital social networks, based on the perceptions of 146 teachers from the São Paulo state public school system, considering the pedagogical, relational, and ethical impacts.

3.2 Specific objectives

1. To identify the main challenges reported by teachers regarding the use of social media in their contact with students.
2. To verify the pedagogical possibilities recognized by teachers for the use of social networks as a tool for interaction and learning.

4 LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature suggests that social networks, although originally created for sociability, have also become environments for informal learning (Recuero, 2014). Young people use these spaces not only for personal interactions, but also to search for content, share experiences, and produce knowledge. From a pedagogical perspective, Moran (2018) emphasizes that education needs to integrate digital culture, since students are already immersed in it. The school, therefore, must recognize this universe and use it critically, without losing sight of ethics and its formative function.

From the perspective of Educational Psychology, Libâneo (2015) reinforces that teacher-student interaction is central to the development of cognitive and socio-emotional processes. However, when this interaction is mediated by social networks, dilemmas arise related to privacy, limits of authority, and the emotional overload of the teacher. Recent studies also reveal the ambivalence of the phenomenon: while some teachers see social networks as a space for closer contact and dialogue with students, others report burnout, invasion of privacy, and even situations of ethical conflict (Brazil, 2023; Pereira; Silva, 2022).

Thus, understanding teacher-student interaction in the age of social networks requires a critical analysis that considers both the educational potential and the risks that this new scenario imposes on teaching. Recuero's (2014) research already pointed out that technological mediation alters the way subjects build social bonds, as online communication tends to blur the boundaries between public and private. For the teacher, this ambiguity can be both an opportunity to create closeness and a source of vulnerability. Moran (2018) reminds us that schools should open themselves to experimentation and innovation, but warns that such openness needs to be planned and contextualized. It is not just a matter of migrating content to digital platforms, but of rethinking pedagogical practices in light of the logic of networks.

According to Libâneo (2015), meaningful learning occurs in contexts of dialogue and cooperation. Social networks, when used well, can enhance this movement, as they allow for horizontal and collaborative interactions. However, when used without reflection, they can merely reproduce power relations and cognitive dispersion.

Another relevant point is the emotional impact that digital interaction can generate in teachers and students. Pereira and Silva (2022) observe that the almost permanent availability on networks creates the expectation of immediate responses, which increases

the pressure on the teacher and makes it difficult to delineate between professional time and personal time.

Brazil (2023) points out that Brazilian youth are among the most active users of social media in the world, making it inevitable that schools engage with this reality. Ignoring this phenomenon can reinforce the distance between the students' cultural universe and the school environment. Although social media can broaden access to information, it does not always guarantee access to systematized knowledge. As Moran (2018) reminds us, informational abundance needs to be accompanied by critical curation and ethical guidance, functions that primarily fall to the teacher.

The literature also shows that there are significant differences in how each generation understands and uses networks. While students see them as a natural extension of their daily lives, many teachers still perceive these spaces as environments that are unrelated to or secondary to the educational process (Recuero, 2014).

Libâneo (2015) emphasizes that teacher training must consider such cultural changes. Without adequate preparation, teachers tend to deal with networks in an improvised way, which increases the likelihood of conflicts and friction. From an ethical point of view, Pereira and Silva (2022) highlight that the use of social networks by teachers requires attention to issues such as confidentiality, language limits, and preservation of professional image. Ignorance of these norms can expose teachers to embarrassing situations or even administrative proceedings.

Furthermore, digital interaction also reconfigures the notion of authority. While in the classroom the teacher occupies a central position, on social networks he or she is just one among countless interlocutors. This shift can both democratize the relationship and weaken the teacher's role (Moran, 2018). Brasil (2023) observes that many continuing education programs are already beginning to include modules on digital culture and social networks, but still in an incipient way. This training gap makes it difficult for teachers to transform digital environments into consistent allies of learning.

International literature also reinforces these concerns. Comparative studies indicate that countries that have invested in critical digital training for teachers have achieved greater pedagogical integration of social networks, reducing the negative effects of overload and expanding innovative practices (Pereira; Silva, 2022).

Recuero (2014) further highlights that the logic of visibility and engagement typical of networks can influence how students perceive the teacher, shifting the focus from knowledge to performance. This can create tensions between the pedagogical and media

dimensions of interaction. In contrast, Moran (2018) argues that, if well-guided, networks allow for the expansion of learning spaces and times, breaking with the rigidity of the classroom. Collaborative projects, study groups, and discussion forums can enrich the school experience.

Libâneo (2015) warns that the socio-emotional dimension of teaching cannot be neglected in this process. Digital mediation, when not accompanied by listening and empathy, risks dehumanizing the educational relationship. Thus, it is essential that networks be used as a complement, and not as a replacement, for face-to-face interaction.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that the literature converges on the idea that social networks represent an irreversible phenomenon in contemporary school life. The question is not whether they should be used, but how to integrate them in a responsible, critical, and pedagogical way, preserving both the quality of education and the well-being of those involved (Brasil, 2023; Recuero, 2014; Moran, 2018; Libâneo, 2015).

5 METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The research conducted is of the action-research type, qualitative and exploratory in nature. According to Thiollent (2011), action-research allows the researcher to intervene in a given reality while simultaneously investigating it, seeking solutions or paths to transformation. The study field included the participation of 146 teachers from the São Paulo state public school system, working in different regions of the state and in various areas of knowledge. The selection of this sample was based on convenience, prioritizing teachers who voluntarily agreed to answer the questionnaire and participate in discussion groups.

The instruments used were:

1. **Semi-structured questionnaire** – for collecting perceptions about the use of social networks in interaction with students.
2. **Online discussion groups** – for in-depth exploration of emerging issues, especially those related to daily practice and ethical dilemmas.

The data analysis was performed using **the content analysis technique**, as described by Bardin (2016), allowing the identification of central categories such as: "pedagogical approach", "teacher privacy", and "ethical boundaries". The entire process respected the ethical norms of educational research, with informed consent and anonymity of the participants.

6 RESULTS OBTAINED

Analysis of questionnaires and focus groups revealed three major central categories: (a) pedagogical approach and student engagement, (b) ethical dilemmas and teacher privacy, **and** (c) workload and limits of the school function.

In the first category, 62% of teachers reported noticing a closer relationship with students. through social media, especially on platforms like WhatsApp and Instagram. Many pointed out that students feel more comfortable asking questions in digital environments than in the classroom. One teacher highlighted: *“On WhatsApp they ask things they would never ask in the classroom. It seems they feel freer”* (Teacher P34).

In the second category, 48% of teachers expressed concern about the exposure of their personal lives and the invasion of their privacy, especially through friend requests on Facebook or viewing stories on Instagram. A significant group reported episodes of messages sent outside of working hours or with content considered inappropriate.

In the third category, 41% of teachers highlighted that digital communication generates work overload, with the expectation of constant availability. One teacher summarized: *“The student sends me a message in the middle of the night and expects a reply. The line between my work and my personal life has disappeared”* (Teacher P102).

On the other hand, 36% of teachers indicated that, when well-planned, social networks can function as complementary pedagogical tools, useful for disseminating materials, videos, podcasts, or content updates. Thus, positive and negative perceptions coexist, revealing the complexity of the phenomenon.

Beyond the percentages presented, the qualitative analysis of the teachers' statements reveals that social networks are being redefined in the daily life of the school. The reported pedagogical approach is not limited to the exchange of content, but also involves the creation of affective and trusting bonds. Many teachers perceive that digital communication establishes a less hierarchical atmosphere, in which students feel more comfortable expressing themselves, revealing a shift from formal authority to a more horizontal relationship. According to Flick (2009), this type of qualitative data allows us to understand the meanings attributed by individuals to their practice, going beyond numbers or frequencies.

However, this movement toward greater proximity also triggers ambiguities. The tension between the public and private spheres of the teacher appears as one of the most

critical dimensions. The concern with personal exposure is not limited to the visibility of posts, but extends to the very redefinition of the boundaries between "being a teacher" and "being an individual". As Minayo (2014) points out, qualitative analysis must consider the contexts and contradictions present in the discourses, as they express complex social and symbolic dynamics.

Work overload, in turn, takes on subjective dimensions that go beyond the extra time dedicated to messages. The feeling of being permanently available generates emotional strain, impacting the quality of teaching and the mental health of teachers. This qualitative dimension reveals that it is not just about "more work," but about the symbolic dissolution of the boundary between the workspace and private life, which can generate a feeling of invasion and loss of autonomy. In this sense, Bardin (2016) reminds us that the categorization of reports allows for visibility of subjective and latent phenomena that would be difficult to capture in strictly quantitative analyses.

Another relevant point is that, despite the dilemmas, many teachers demonstrated creative ability in transforming these tools into meaningful pedagogical resources. Reports indicate initiatives such as reading groups, debates mediated by short videos, and even the use of podcasts to expand classroom discussions. This critical appropriation of networks indicates that, when there is planning and pedagogical intentionality, digital technologies can reinforce learning and not just generate additional demands. This is an example of what Flick (2009) calls "interpretive potential", when individuals re-signify everyday tools in innovative practices.

Finally, the qualitative analysis reveals that the teaching experience with social networks is not homogeneous, but rather traversed by contradictory perceptions that reflect both the potential and the risks of these platforms. The phenomenon is marked by the coexistence of enthusiasm, caution, and resistance, suggesting that any proposal for integrating digital media into education needs to consider not only quantitative indicators, but also the subjective and emotional experiences of teachers. Thus, as Minayo (2014) argues, understanding social complexity implies recognizing that reality is multifaceted and cannot be reduced to numbers or general trends.

7 DISCUSSION

The results obtained confirm the literature on the ambivalence of social networks in the educational context. On the one hand, these tools can broaden interaction, reduce communication barriers, and foster the construction of closer bonds between teachers and students (Recuero, 2014; Moran, 2018). The greater “digital disinhibition” of students connects with the idea that technological mediation can create new non-formal learning spaces (Castells, 2013). However, ethical and professional dilemmas also emerge, corroborating Libâneo's (2015) observations, for whom teaching authority is built upon clear boundaries between the pedagogical function and the teacher's private life. Presence on social networks puts this boundary at risk, opening space for conflicts and emotional strain.

Another relevant aspect is the reported overload. According to UNESCO (2021), the pandemic consolidated the expectation of teacher availability on digital platforms, creating a feeling of continuous work. This phenomenon is identified in the category of “intensification of teaching work,” already discussed in national research on education and technology (Brazil, 2023). The research also demonstrates that some teachers are able to reframe the use of social networks as a pedagogical resource, validating Moran's (2018) proposal to integrate digital culture with active methodologies. However, this appropriation requires clear institutional policies, continuing education, and strategies to protect teacher privacy.

Thus, teacher-student interaction in the age of social networks presents itself as a field of pedagogical potential, but also of ethical and labor tensions, which need to be mediated by institutional regulations and critical reflection on teaching practice. A central point that deserves highlighting is the impact of social networks on the configuration of power relations in the educational space. If, in the classroom, the teacher's authority is legitimized by the institutional role and the established pedagogical contract, in the digital environment this hierarchy can be relativized. As Castells (2013) points out, networks create horizontal structures of interaction, in which the logic of authority tends to be replaced by the logic of influence. This can favor closer relationships, but it can also weaken the perception of limits necessary for teaching practice.

Furthermore, the presence of students and teachers in shared digital spaces intensifies the exposure of personal aspects. Recuero (2014) points out that the construction of digital identity is marked by public performances that blend professional and private dimensions. In this sense, increased visibility can jeopardize the teacher's image, since

everyday behaviors, political opinions, or personal stances can be interpreted as an extension of their professional practice.

Another relevant element is the issue of teacher well-being in the face of pressure to be constantly connected. Recent studies demonstrate that the "culture of availability" directly affects the mental health of teachers, increasing rates of stress, anxiety, and burnout (UNESCO, 2021). In this scenario, technological mediation, which could promote innovation, also becomes a source of burnout, reinforcing the need for institutional policies that regulate the digital workload.

It is important to note that students, in turn, also experience this ambivalence. On the one hand, they feel closer to teachers and more comfortable expressing doubts and insecurities in digital environments. On the other hand, they may feel pressured by the expectation of immediate answers and by the indirect control that networks exert over their daily lives (Brazil, 2023). This tension demonstrates that the challenge is not only for teachers, but also for the pedagogical relationship itself in times of connectivity.

In this context, Moran (2018) proposes that digital culture be incorporated in a planned way, avoiding improvisations that lead to overload and conflict. The author argues that active methodologies based on digital technologies are only effective when linked to clear pedagogical objectives and when there is a collective project for their use. This means that it is not enough to simply use social networks in teaching, but to reflect critically on the "how" and the "why".

Another aspect to consider is the unequal access to technology. Research from TIC Kids Online Brasil (2023) shows that, although the use of networks is widespread among young people, there are still significant differences in the type of connection, the quality of access, and the availability of equipment. Thus, the use of social networks as a pedagogical resource can, paradoxically, amplify existing inequalities, especially in public schools in peripheral regions.

For this reason, Libâneo (2015) insists on the need for digital mediation to be accompanied by public policies that guarantee equitable access. Without this support, the risk is transforming networks into an exclusionary space, where only some students can truly interact and benefit from the pedagogical possibilities offered. The responsibility, therefore, should not fall solely on the teacher, but should involve educational institutions and managers.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that critical reflection on the use of social networks in the educational field needs to be constant. The digital landscape is in constant

transformation, and new platforms emerge with their own dynamics of interaction. As Castells (2013) points out, the network society is characterized by the speed of change and the complexity of communication flows. This means that educational research must remain attentive to innovations, monitoring the impacts that each new technology can bring to the relationships between teachers, students, and institutions.

8 CONCLUSION

Research conducted with 146 teachers from the São Paulo state public school system revealed that teacher-student interaction on social media is an ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, it expands opportunities for dialogue, brings students closer together, and enhances digital pedagogical resources; on the other hand, it compromises teachers' privacy, intensifies their workload, and generates ethical dilemmas about the limits of the school's role.

It is concluded that social networks cannot be ignored in the educational context, but neither should they be used haphazardly and without reflection. It is necessary to build institutional protocols, specific training for teachers, **and** awareness strategies for students regarding the limits and possibilities of these interactions. From a scientific point of view, this study contributes to the debate on teaching in digital times, bringing the perceptions of teachers from different regions of the state of São Paulo. From a practical point of view, it offers support for schools and education systems to implement more balanced technological mediation policies.

In summary, it is reaffirmed that teacher-student interaction in the age of social media should be understood not as a threat to teaching authority, but as a pedagogical and ethical challenge that demands new forms of action from educators, based on critical thinking, autonomy, and dialogue.

The analysis of the results allows us to understand that teacher-student interaction in the age of social networks is marked by a dual movement: while it opens up new pedagogical possibilities, it also exposes teachers and students to ethical, emotional, and institutional dilemmas. The potential of networks lies in expanding communication, reducing barriers, and creating alternative learning spaces (Recuero, 2014; Moran, 2018).

However, this potential is accompanied by tensions, especially regarding the preservation of teaching authority and the maintenance of boundaries between professional

and personal life (Libâneo, 2015). The increased visibility and the dissolution of boundaries between the public and private spheres demand critical reflection on the role of the teacher in the digital environment, at the risk of weakening their legitimacy.

Another crucial point concerns the intensification of teaching work in the digital context, a phenomenon reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which consolidated the expectation of continuous availability (UNESCO, 2021). This situation highlights the urgency of institutional policies that establish clear parameters for the use of networks, preventing the virtual space from becoming a source of exhaustion and emotional strain. At the same time, it cannot be ignored that students themselves experience similar contradictions: they find greater freedom of expression on networks, but also face implicit demands, pressure for availability, and inequalities in technological access (Brazil, 2023). Therefore, the discussion is not limited to teaching practice, but extends to the reconfiguration of pedagogical relationships in a hyper-connected society .

Literature suggests that incorporating social media as a pedagogical resource needs to be guided by collective projects and active methodologies with clear intentionality (Moran, 2018). Improvised use, without institutional guidelines, can generate more problems than benefits, reinforcing inequalities and creating friction.

For this reason, it is essential that public authorities and educational institutions assume co-responsibility in this process, guaranteeing infrastructure, continuing education, and adequate working conditions so that teachers and students can benefit from the pedagogical potential of the networks in a balanced and fair environment (Libâneo, 2015).

In summary, the study confirms that teacher-student interaction mediated by social networks cannot be analyzed in a reductionist way, as something exclusively positive or negative. It is a field of disputes and resignifications that requires regulation, critical reflection, and constant updating of pedagogical practices (Castells, 2013).

Thus, the consolidation of a healthy and ethical pedagogical use of social networks will depend on the collective capacity to balance technological innovation, privacy protection, equitable access, and the appreciation of teaching work. Only in this balance will it be possible to transform the digital environment into an ally of contemporary education, without abandoning the fundamental principles of pedagogical practice.

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