

Pierre Bourdieu And Paulo Freire: Interlocutions Of Two Critics Of Social Inequality In Education

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Abstract:

Social inequality is a hallmark of human societies throughout their history. The domination of certain social segments over others has already occurred under various pretexts, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic belonging. On the other hand, throughout this history, there have also been voices critical of inequality, identifying ways by which it is reproduced and consolidated, as well as pointing out ways to overcome it. In these terms, the reflections of Pierre Bourdieu in relation to the French society and Paulo Freire in relation to the Brazilian context stand out in this text. The text aims to establish some interlocutions between these two authors, highlighting their respective contributions to the critique of social inequality in the field of education. We can conclude that, despite coming from different contexts, both agree on the need to think about a new education, which does not only serve the dominant classes and that promotes the autonomy and freedom of the subjects.

Keywords: habitus; autonomy; domination; social classes; emancipation.

Date of Submission: 20-12-2023

Date of Acceptance: 30-12-2023

I. Introduction

Social inequality is not just a topic in recent times in human history. Since their start, human societies have been affected by segregation. It occurs because of many factors, because of the dynamics of difference, according to which individuals, even when they exist under very similar conditions, tend to create differences for themselves, as a way of organizing their individual identities (BAADE, 2014).

The historically constructed differences between different human groups are based on different discourses, such as that of ethnic groups, in which spoken language plays an important role; of race; of culture; and of social class or socioeconomic belonging. The State, in the meantime, has the function and exercise of maintaining and preserving the social group, in which the school, as a social institution, has a central role. At school, newcomers (ARENDDT, 2016) are introduced to social dynamics and become familiar with established social standards and, ideally speaking, are prepared to build and rebuild society in such a way that it offers them the conditions for having life in the way that best suits them.

It turns out that the presupposed hegemony and cohesion of national States has proven to be historically illusory, precisely due to the dynamics of differentiation of the social process. Furthermore, human groups do not remain stagnant in certain geographic regions but tend to move for different reasons. Thus, the societies that constitute national states are, empirically, multifaceted. The school, in this sense, is faced with a somewhat complex challenge, which is to guarantee the continuity of the community, without, however, being clear about which community we are talking about. So, if there is this gap in terms of definition and purpose, the different social groups that make up a given society may use school to achieve their own objectives to the detriment of other groups in that same society. The school, in these terms, becomes a room for dispute.

This problem is not unprecedented and has already been the subject of study by many researchers. For this research, it is interesting to analyze the contributions of two thinkers, Paulo Freire, and Pierre Bourdieu. They come from and represent different contexts. The first one is Brazilian, the second one is French. Therefore,

this text aims to establish some dialogues between these two authors, highlighting their respective contributions regarding the critique of social inequality in the field of education.

Methodologically, this research is basic in nature and has a qualitative approach. The objective can be defined as exploratory, considering that it does not delve into the more specific issues that mark the trajectories and research of each of the authors analyzed. As for technical procedures, it can be classified as bibliographic and uses content analysis in the treatment of selected data. The sources used to compile the text are primary productions by the two authors researched and representative studies selected by criteria of relevance in relation to the specific point under analysis.

The research results are presented in three parts: the first one presents Bourdieu's thoughts, highlighting the main elements of his sociological theory and its relationship with school. In the second one, Paulo Freire's thought and his contributions to educational thought rooted in the Brazilian context are presented. Finally, we reflect on the possible challenges for the school based on the contributions of the two authors. Last, but not least, some considerations are made, and a list of references used in the analysis is presented.

II. Bourdieu's Sociology and criticism of school as a reproducer of inequalities

The relationship between school and society can be analyzed from different perspectives, but it is not possible to ignore Pierre Bourdieu's contributions in this field. The author's work is especially marked by the themes of domination and oppression, also present in the works of Brazilian author Paulo Freire (VAN ACKER, 2020). In his intellectual production, Bourdieu strives to understand the ways in which a portion of a given society maintains its domination and hegemony over the rest of the population, without the express and literal use of violence, especially through educational systems. For this analysis, the French author uses two concepts considered key: power and habitus.

Bourdieu sustains his intellectual production on Marxist theory, and the concepts of social class play a very central role in his thought. The capitalist model of organization of labor relations determines social structuring and separates the people who own the means of production from those who must sell their labor to the first group to have access to the means of survival. However, with the rise of republican and democratic models of social organization, guided by the ideals defended since the Enlightenment and which culminated in the French Revolution, namely, liberty, equality, and fraternity; physical violence is no longer an instrument that can be used to preserve the domination of one part of society over another. This also occurred because the very complexification of society made subjects more skilled in escaping the chains of their dominators. In these terms, the possibilities of domination and especially of its maintenance also needed to develop. This is one of Bourdieu's great contributions to the analysis of today's society.

Bourdieu (2007b) has social inequality as one of the assumptions of his analysis and proposes to understand the factors that sustain this inequality. The author asks, then, how can a part of society be subjected to the designs of another, in general, numerically smaller, when living in a "democratic" and "free" society. Bourdieu (2007b) uses the concept of power to characterize this unequal relationship. Inequality is sustained by the exercise of power by some over others, which is one of the determinants of the marked social distances of contemporary societies.

On power, Bourdieu (2007b, p. 7s.) states:

[...] It is necessary to know how to discover it where it allows itself to be seen less, where it is more completely ignored, and therefore recognized: symbolic power is, in fact, that invisible power which can only be exercised with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they exercise it.

The concept of symbolic power allows us to understand how the exercise of power is maintained in a society in which physical force is no longer legitimate. Domination and oppression came to be exercised in this new social structure through symbolic systems, which are shared by dominators and dominated. Violence is no longer physical but has been transmuted in contemporary societies into symbolic violence (BOURDIEU, 2007a; 2007b).

The exercise of power and symbolic violence does not allow us to see the transformation of fundamental rights, considered as the foundations of democratic societies, into privileges for part of the population. In other words, when what is considered as rights, such as basic sanitation, education, health, and public safety, for example, are enjoyed only by a portion, this ceases to be a right and becomes only a privilege of a fraction of society.

In view of this, Bourdieu (2007b) strives to understand how the reproduction of power relations between social classes occurs in societies. The author recognizes that inequality is no longer sustained using force, but through the imposition of a certain way of seeing the world. This worldview would depend, according to Bourdieu, on the symbolic, cultural, and economic capital to which the subjects of the different classes have access, and which govern their actions in society. These actions resulting from capitals, finally, are configured and sedimented in the form of *habitus*, or behaviors internalized by the subjects and that determine the action

without resorting to a reflection on what is done in the situations considered to be the most common in everyday life. Thus, a class *habitus* emerges. Inequality and injustice, from this perspective, come to be seen as something natural (BOURDIEU, 2007a).

This raises another issue, related to the reproduction of inequality, which makes one resort to the concept of social capital. The idea of social capital is an important contribution of Bourdieu to the reflection on the social role of education and how power, that is, access to social goods, circulates in society.

Social capital is the set of current or potential resources that are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relations of interknowledge and interrelationship or, in other words, to the attachment to a group as a set of agents that are not only endowed with common properties (which can be perceived by the observer, but also to the by others or by themselves) but they are also united by permanent and useful links (NOGUEIRA; CATANI, 1998, p. 67).

The original text highlights three aspects in this paragraph: the durable network of relationships, the attachment to a group, and the permanent and useful links. The durable network of relationships is constituted by the environment that has been institutionalized as a product of the work of those who have invested in the relationships. In this case, it is not limited to the kinship group, but extends to the neighborhood, to work relationships when the person obtains recognition of his or her social value. It is imagined that by working with the group that surrounds him, giving something of himself, the person begins to add not only recognition, but also seeks to ensure the link to a group or even to different social groups. This can be linked to an important surname or actions that have been testified to in signs of social recognition. After this recognition arise the connections that, at first, may be circumstantial, but which can become permanent and useful. And from these connections and the management of social capital, the person can end up with more or less power within the group. And this implies having what Bourdieu calls profits for belonging, which can be material and symbolic profits (NOGUEIRA; CATANI, 1998). Thus, the social function of the school may be, at the very least, to make notorious the idea that social, economic, cultural, and symbolic capital are, or at least should be enjoyed by all the people who make up the circle of sociability.

Thus, the school becomes responsible for managing equity in a reality of strong inequalities.

For this reason, Bourdieu says: "different individuals obtain a very unequal return from a capital (economic or cultural) more or less equivalent, according to the degree to which they can mobilize, by proxy, the capital of a group (family, former students of 'elite' schools, select clubs, nobility, etc.) more or less constituted as such and more or less provided with capital" (apud NOGUEIRA; CATANI, 1998, p. 68-69). Relationships come into play in this reflection, that is, who the person knows about the circles of power and what power derives from these relationships or bonds.

There are disputes over the ownership of capital, that is, there are social groups that feel they have more rights over current capital to the detriment of other groups. Or even within certain groups there are people who feel more entitled to enjoy or manipulate the social goods of the group than others. In this sense, one can analyze why some people feel more qualified to have command over groups or one could also use the term leadership. Where does leadership emanate from? It results from the work done to build social capital with the group, but it can also be linked to a surname or a position that was inherited from a leader, a name already built previously. This can happen by sponsorship or legacy.

The approach to the issue of social inequalities is a meeting point between Bourdieu and Freire.

III. Freire and the confronting oppression for freedom and autonomy

Paulo Freire can be considered the most prominent Brazilian thinker of the twentieth century. His work and his thoughts on education can be seen as great bastions of pedagogy in Brazil and in the world. His works such as "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1987) and "Education as a Practice of Freedom" (2009) are important milestones in the constitution of a way of thinking about human formation for emancipation and for the awareness of the need to look at students (of all ages) as autonomous beings capable of learning from their own realities. His main idea of education involves the overcoming of a mere banking education (FREIRE, 1987), in which the students would only be depositories of an inert, hierarchical, and imposing knowledge. From this innovative conception, Freire contributes to a more accurate and sharper look at the problems of education in a segregationist and CLT system (Consolidated Labor Laws) world. In this context, and in full harmony with Bourdieu, the Brazilian author thinks of an education that is effectively more democratic, forming criticality and involved with everyday life.

Thus, for Freire, education must clearly show the oppressive tangle that supplants mainly the neediest people. In the same way, the teaching work is wallowing in the responsibility of turning people excluded from the "standard" system of education into people emancipated and engaged in the world in which they live. That said, it is necessary to point out that, in general, many times, the process of educational formation leads people to deny their roots and their place in the world. Furthermore, Freire's idea aims to point out that, through education, it is necessary to assume, in a more emphatic way, the "place" in this world through the association

between the real world and the learned world. This, according to Freire, must be assumed first by teachers to the extent that they adopt the ambivalent role of "teachers" and "learners". He himself affirms this when he says:

The learning of the teacher when teaching does not necessarily take place through the rectification that the learner makes of mistakes made. The learning of the teacher in teaching is seen when the teacher, humble, open, is permanently available to rethink what he thinks, to see himself in his positions, seeking to engage with the curiosity of the students and the different paths taken. Some of these paths are traveled by the curiosity of the students, full of suggestions, with questions that were not perceived before by the teacher. But now, when teaching, not as a bureaucrat of the mind, but by reconstructing the paths of his curiosity – which is why his conscious, sensitive, emotional body is open to the divinations of the students, to their ingenuity and to their creativity – the teacher who acts in this way has, in his teaching, a rich moment of his learning. The teacher first learns to teach but learns to teach by teaching something that is relearned because it is being taught (FREIRE, 2001, p. 259).

In this way of understanding the teaching/learning process in which the teacher assumes, concomitantly, the idea of being a teacher and a learner, Freire emphasized the democratic role of education, in which the teacher, far from being a knower of knowledge, is a continuous and constant learner, because to the extent that he teaches what he knows, he relearns what he already knew and puts himself in the position of mediator, collaborator and, in some cases, interpreter of knowledge. This more humanized and non-dictatorial attitude towards knowledge earned him great hardships during the years of lead in Brazil (1964-1985). As a result, he was exiled and spent more than 15 years outside the country (1964-1980). During this period, he was able to analyze with great parsimony and attention the educational problems of the country and wrote works that forever marked his pedagogical understanding. It should not be forgotten that one of the most famous phrases he wrote is contained in the book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" written for the first time in 1968 when he was in exile in Chile: "No one frees anyone, no one frees himself alone: men liberate themselves in communion" (FREIRE, 1987, p. 29).

From this need for communion and liberation, Freire understood that it was necessary for educators to incorporate a democratic vision of education. This educational democratization should permeate a clear understanding of how to manage and administer school life, beyond the "school benches". This educational understanding would require the need to analyze what should be the role of teachers, students, families, and the community in the constitution of a pedagogy aimed at the liberation and emancipation of all. In other words, the school space is one of the environments where people can learn, but it is not the only one. Thus, the school community plays an important role in the composition and identification of its students. As we have seen, if this does not happen, there is a risk that the school will be a space for the mere transfer of content, and Freire never agreed with that.

Thus, when we talk about school management/administration, it must be taken into account that the one who administers or assumes the function of managing the school must take the metaphorical position of the mother who gestates, in her womb, her baby, although this baby is never completely hers: the caring mother needs to understand that the baby is not a possession, it is not an object that must be carefully monitored and controlled by her. This form of exacerbated care can only embody an idea of possession or dictatorship, which totally escapes the concept of responsibility over the child, because by obstinately incorporating the temporary role of caring, the mother can, after the birth of the baby, avoid at all costs her search for autonomy and emancipation.

Comparatively, it is often seen that many school administrators assume a role of severe control over all school actions. The administrative role seems to be "untouchable" and exclusive good of the one who personifies this role. This attitude obscures the democratic management of schools and ends up creating an unbearable space for others. And this occurs precisely because the democratic need to see the school as a "place for everyone" is not seen in a broader way. The school, for this type of administrator, is a space of power and control. However, as the importance of Freire's thought for school management is discussed here, Liliane Martins Costa and Marlisa Alagia de Oliveira Fico say that:

The primary pillar for democratic school management is the decentralization of the power given to managers – which consist of principals, supervisors, coordinators, and inspectors – where their former attributions have been transfigured, moving from the position of isolated leader to the role of mediator, both of people and problems, to create and maintain a balance within the school. All this to reach a process that seeks to prioritize the participation of all in school decisions, enabling the members of their community to exercise democracy, in addition to facilitating the search for better forms of administration and resolution of problems that may arise throughout the school year (COSTA; FICO, 2017).

From this point of view, thinking about school management implies the participation of all. Otherwise, we fall into the problem already pointed out by Bourdieu, that the school, instead of favoring the transformation of people and their surroundings, ends up reproducing the same processes of exclusion and selection that exist in the world by reinforcing the inequalities that already exist in the world outside of school. Thus, what Freire

always defended was the necessary liberation from this social model through education. Thus, education does not only take place within the classroom environment. It must occur in all public spaces, because if this is not a fact, the only existing pedagogy is that of the oppressor, in which the oppressed ends up incorporating as the only and true. For this reason, Costa and Fico confirm that, in this way:

[...] The school will then, through democratic management, take root in the community in which it is inserted, and will come to play a role beyond the theoretical in the life of that society and its students. The consolidation of a democratic system that works and allows everyone to exercise their freedom of opinion involves students, facilitating learning through practice and increasing their individual development, since democratic management inserts into its curriculum the specific reality of where it is located and presents students with autonomy for future problem solving (COSTA; FICO, 2017).

Also, according to Costa and Fico (2017), Freire's thinking only reinforces what is already stated in national documents on education and school management, starting with the Federal Constitution. According to the authors,

It presents the conceptual and practical bases of democratic school management, as we can see in article 206, item VI of the Federal Constitution of 1988, where it is pointed out as one of the principles of education in the country, as follows:

Art. 206. Teaching will be based on the following principles:

[...]

VI - democratic management of public education, in accordance with the law (COSTA; FICO, 2017)

According to this, we can infer that when we talk about democratic management and consensual forms of school administration, we are not talking about innovative elements. The Federal Constitution is a document that has been in force for more than 30 years. However, when one looks at Brazil's past and the legacy of the military dictatorship, one can identify its deleterious effects on the country's collective imagination, as it is still easier to follow orders from those who possibly "know more" than to take the courage to participate. Unfortunately, this inheritance often constrains, scares away and banishes true social and popular participation in public debates, and this is constantly seen when it comes to democratic school management.

Despite this, one cannot look at the subject with hopelessness and disbelief, because gradually we see the creation of a new culture that is based not only on laws and documents, but on concrete actions, as is the case of the text "Paulo Freire and Democratic Management: a reading of the experience of participation in the Department of Education of the Municipality of Santo André/SP", written by Márcia Kay, Maurício Carrara and Patricia Kay, published in the Journal of Educational Administration, in 2013. In the text, the authors present not only an experience report on the world of school administration, but also mention the importance of a new administrative culture capable of breaking with centralizing paradigms of school management and governance:

By assuming the commitment to democratic management that takes into account the democratization of education, which presupposes the need for change in the pedagogical culture and, also, the qualitative change for the benefit of the population as a whole, the Municipal Department of Education establishes an approximation with Freire's assumptions, to the extent that Freire stands out as defender of democratic and participatory conceptions of organization, of an organization as a practice of freedom, that is, of autonomous and self-governing organizations, indispensable arenas for political, social, economic, cultural democracy, etc. The great contribution in theoretical and practical terms, which in this regard will end up being elicited from his experience as a school administrator-politician, from the Municipal Department of Education and from the interaction with his government team, is precisely to take up and deepen his initial conceptions, now by more immediate reference to the problems of the democratic governance of education and public schools. [...] (KAY; CARRARA; KAY, 2013, p. 56).

Paulo Freire, as already mentioned at the beginning of this section, should be considered by his life experience and his intellectual production, the patron of Brazilian pedagogy, because his ideas were not only innovative and extraordinary for their theoretical content, but for the dialectical and dialogical capacity to amalgamate the aspirations of a liberating education with the necessary changes that the post-military dictatorship democracy in Brazil needed to embrace and personify. In any case, it is worth noting that the works of Freire and Bourdieu are fundamental in their role of denouncing and announcing the social function of the school, because if Bourdieu demonstrates that education is a space that can be marked by the reproducibility of inequalities; Freire calls for the highly emancipatory function of the school space as an environment for the exercise of citizenship and democracy.

IV. School challenges based on the contributions of Bourdieu and Freire

The intersection of Pierre Bourdieu's and Paulo Freire's educational theories offers a rich perspective for analyzing the challenges faced by contemporary schools. Bourdieu, with his sociological approach,

highlights the influence of social fields and power structures on education, revealing how the reproduction of social inequalities occurs in the educational system. Meanwhile, Paulo Freire, in his pedagogical approach, emphasizes the importance of education as a tool for emancipation and awareness, highlighting the need to overcome authoritarian and oppressive practices. By uniting these perspectives, one can explore how educational institutions face challenges related to equity, inclusion, student empowerment, and the transformation of social structures that perpetuate inequalities. In this context, it examines how the interaction between the ideas of Bourdieu and Freire can offer valuable *insights* to enhance education and overcome obstacles that undermine its transformative potential.

From the point of view of administrative thinking, it is important to highlight the existence of several indicators that can define the good progress of the management of a company or institution. Among the various indicators pointed out by André Ribeiro Ferreira (2013), representativeness can be highlighted as the most important for the purposes of this analysis. According to him:

Representativeness: capturing the most important and critical steps of the processes, in the right place, so that it is sufficiently representative and comprehensive. Unnecessary or non-existent data should not be collected. On the other hand, important data must be accurate, meet objectives, and be sought from the right source. This attribute deserves some attention, because very representative indicators tend to be more difficult to obtain. Therefore, there must be a certain balance between representativeness and availability for collection (FERREIRA, 2013, p. 40).

When transmuting this concept to the school environment, it can be said that the idea of representativeness is also related to the proper balance of the people who should represent the teaching staff, the administration and the families and their respective availability in the collection of the necessary data for the proper school administration. In other words, the representativeness indicator demands clear and objective communication about the parties that involve the school administration.

The transit and transparency of information between all parties involved in the school world is a great challenge, because due to communication failures, many misunderstandings and "grudges" arise and hinder the fluidity in the interaction between the parties. This can have a negative influence on the democratic capacity of administration, as it is very common to perceive that the disagreements between the various members that make up the school world are a corollary of truncated and noisy communication. This can be emphasized, essentially, when considering the invention of new communication technologies that, in some way, end up harming the forms of communicational interaction.

This can be clarified when Ferreira says that "people's relationship with their work establishes the behavioral bases necessary for organizational change and depends more on people's attitudes and decisions than on technology and superior decisions" (FERREIRA, 2013, p. 35). From a perspective of school administration from a democratic perspective, Ferreira's phrase is as applicable as in a business institution, because attitudes in favor of democracy demand more the will of those involved than the use of communication technologies. Technology helps and simplifies many processes, but it can also be a source of contention and disagreements that undermine two fundamental points of school administration: open debate and the feeling of "community". This process can be inflated by the bubble effect characteristic of communicative processes mediated by digital technologies, and particularly social networks, as highlighted by Han (2022).

Thus, whether from a representative point of view or from an interactive point of view, communication in the school world needs to be frank and direct, so that there is no room for power disputes or oppression. In other words, what Freire and Bourdieu, each in their own way, most repudiate within the school context, are these clashes existing in the social environment that are transported to the world of the school. If, on the one hand, these disputes are frequent in the social world, it is necessary to avoid them in the world of the school so as not to reproduce the oppression experienced in society.

The school must be a space of freedom, and this should not only occur in the teacher/student relationship, but must also occur in the adopted management methodology, where all those concerned have the right to voice and turn. True representation does not occur purely and simply in a hierarchical form in which some command and others obey. Management models based on old organizational charts that unilaterally manage an organization or institution can and should be reviewed so that the relationship between the parties is understood as the balance between demands and back-ups or between representativeness and availability.

Popular and democratic participation should be the consequence and not the cause of a management focused on truly educational purposes. The janitor educates, the cook educates, the educated father educates, the father with low schooling also educates. Children educate. The interaction of all in the search for integral formation is the means and education is the end that stitches all those involved. From the dispersion of interests, emerges the need for coordinated and joint action that brings everyone together. In this case, it is corroborated by Freire when he says that "no one educates anyone, no one educates himself, men educate each other, mediated by the world" (FREIRE, 1987, p. 68).

Therefore, we believe that it is in this interaction between all those involved that education, school administration, school life and representativeness are intertwined. The denial of Freire's idea, based on this analysis, results in imposing, oppressive and unilateral actions of educational actions that obstruct a holistic, complex, and comprehensive vision of a school management aimed at an emancipatory formation of all its members, because as the popular saying states: "no one is so intelligent that they have nothing to learn, and no one is so ignorant that they have nothing to teach". Thus, school management must go beyond the mere role of managing the school and play the role of democratic articulation between the three worlds that surround it: that of children (and respectively, of their families), that of teachers and that of the public space, especially municipal, state, or federal public schools.

V. Final considerations

Knowledge management is carried out in the context of the management of cultural, social, and symbolic capitals that converge to and in the educational institution, whether basic or higher. It is part of the analysis how and in what proportion students have access to social, cultural, and symbolic goods that are, or are not, available to be accessed in society.

Knowledge management is not only organizing, within the educational agency, that all people belonging to the group have access to epistemic capital, but also understanding why this happens or not. Managing knowledge and making it accessible to the people in the group involved, is more than distributing a few cultural goods. It is to analyze possible ways of working in an emancipatory process and its consequences for the access and distribution of different capitals.

According to Freire, democratic management advocates teamwork and presupposes the participation of all the people involved. In his writings, he advocated the organization of people in groups to have a voice and resist domination and the advance of inequality. Bourdieu, on the other hand, by drawing attention to the inequality that is reproduced in school, evokes the idea that to manage is to enable access and voice to the people involved in the process and, perhaps, to help the people themselves to resist the advance and reproduction of inequality.

Then, we get to the emancipatory task of the school. In this conception, the educational agency would seek more the transformation of society or, at least, the awareness of the inequalities present in society and, therefore, also in education, than the maintenance of the mechanisms of social reproduction.

The search for emancipation can take place in small movements of organization and participation of all the people in the school circle. And this possibility arises from the type of management established in the institutions. People participate because it is a group achievement, but participation also needs to be provided by management.

VI. Support/Financing

Foundation for Research and Innovation Support of the State of Santa Catarina (Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação do Estado de Santa Catarina) FAPESC. FAPESC Public Call Notice Nº. 54/2022 – Science, Technology and Innovation Program to Support Research Groups of the Santa Catarina Association of Educational Foundations (Associação Catarinense das Fundações Educacionais) ACAFE - Term of Grant Nº. 2023TR000670

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