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Performativity and large-scale assessment: a discourse analysis using Bourdieu

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Abstract: This article aims to analyse teachers' discourse concerning large-scale assessment through the Brazilian High School National Examination (Enem), employing Pierre Bourdieu's framework of discourse analysis. The investigation was guided by the following research question: What is the nature of teachers' discourse on the Enem assessment in the state of Piauí? The study adopted Bourdieu's method of discourse analysis as its theoretical and methodological foundation and was conducted in a public secondary school located in a rural area of Piauí. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with six teachers to explore the meanings and representations attributed to the assessment process. The findings indicate that teachers have internalised the dominant discourse promoted by the Piauí State Department of Education (Seduc-PI), which is characterised by a performative language centred on measurable outcomes and structured by a linguistic marketplace that legitimises particular symbolic practices. It was observed that, within this context, performativity generates stigmatising effects within professional discourse, with emotional and occupational implications, reinforcing a pejorative sense of exclusion by imposing a results-oriented automatism on a field that inherently resists such instrumental logic.

Keywords: discourse analysis; large-scale assessment; high school national examination (Enem).

1 Introduction

Large-scale or external assessment gained centrality in the educational context from the 1980s and 1990s onwards, resulting from the transformation of the forms of management and organization of state policies. Its emergence is associated with the dissemination of the values, ideologies, and discourses of the neoliberal system, marked by a powerful force of rational belief in economic theory as a solution to educational problems (Catani *et al.*, 2017). Large-scale assessment functions as an indicator of market performance, presenting the results of tests applied on a large scale to students and guiding investments, as well as the efficiency and effectiveness of education, through political technologies such as performativity (Ball, 2014; Horta Neto, 2014; Sousa Sobrinho; Cavalcanti, 2023).

In this context, more than simply serving as indicators of market performance, large-scale assessments constitute mechanisms for regulating educational quality.



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These assessments have been appropriated by various business groups and international organizations as strategic mechanisms for promoting and inducing educational practices driven by market logic.

Concomitantly, within schools, this logic is expressed through the intensification of performativity, the continuous monitoring of indicators, curricular standardization, and the reorganization of teaching work based on goals and performance. Thus, large-scale external assessments not only inform about education but can also contribute to the production of typical dispositions related to market logic, which then operate as principles of school practices and discourses in favor of performativity.

Ball (2010) considers performativity a political culture or technology that operates in the transformation of policies, practices, and professionals in terms of control and comparisons, focusing on measurable, nameable, and classificatory results. The effectiveness of this notion finds space in the formation of discourses that consolidate the ideals of this policy within the neoliberal system. Therefore, discourse is evidence of the operationalization of performativity.

In Brazilian literature on discourse analysis (DA), there is a predominance of analyses of the French school focused on the precepts of Foucault, Michel Pêcheux, Eni Orlandi, Bakhtin, Maingueneau, Fairclough, and Bourdieu. Regarding Bourdieu, few studies are based on an analysis of language or discourse (Barreiros, 2023). Therefore, this article aims to operationalize a discourse analysis from a Bourdieusian perspective, reducing the theoretical-methodological and empirical gap in a sociology of discourse in Bourdieu.

Given the favorable space for the expansion of performativity in educational discourse, engendered by large-scale assessments, the objective was to analyze teachers' discourse on large-scale assessments in the state of Piauí, based on Bourdieu's precepts of discourse. The proposal was to articulate the theme of large-scale assessment with discourse analysis in Bourdieu, considering the proliferation of performativity in the discursive practices of teachers (Abreu, 2023; Bechi, 2021; Lira; Barbosa, 2023).

2 Notions of Bourdieu's Sociology for discourse analysis

Throughout his studies, Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) presented a theoretical and operational framework for investigating the social world. His sociological pragmatics provides potential constructs for sociological analyses, encompassing a practical epistemology. Therefore, this study aims to present the contributions of Bourdieu's thought to discourse analysis in educational research, without labeling the author or restricting his theoretical tools; rather, it points to paths for those who analyze or intend to analyze discourses from a Bourdieusian perspective.

Bourdieu's theory of praxeological knowledge is grounded in field experiences, primarily in studies of Kabyle ethnology in Algeria during the 1960s, as well as in theoretical debates focused on structuralism, phenomenology, and Marxism, as closed theoretical fields intended to think about the object (Bourdieu, 2002). What Bourdieu proposes is to articulate the forms of objectivist knowledge, which apprehends practices from outside objective relations, such as economic or linguistic ones, with those of subjective knowledge, which delves first into the social world and then into the familiar and natural world, excluding the structural conditions of socialization.

According to the sociologist,

The theory of practice as practice evokes, against positivist materialism, that objects of knowledge are constructed and not passively recorded, and, against intellectualist idealism, that the principle of this construction is the system of structured and structuring dispositions that is constituted in practice and that is always oriented towards practical functions (Bourdieu, 2009, p. 86).

In this context, to refer to discourses, it is necessary to analyze these dispositions, which Bourdieu calls habitus, in relation to the social structure, because “[...] to register such language without restoring the functions it fulfills and the social conditions of its effectiveness is to legitimize a construction of social reality [...] in accordance with the interests of a specific group” (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 148). Therefore, discourse analysis is guided by the social conditions of the effectiveness of discourse, which involve an internalization of exteriority and an externalization of interiority. For Bourdieu (2008a), discourses are discursive practices because they align with the habitus of the agents and the structures of discursive production.

In Bourdieu's (2009) view, habitus is a system of enduring and transposable dispositions across time, historically constituted in the relationships between agents

and structures. These dispositions for acting, speaking, and perceiving the world are incorporated and function as generative schemes, products of history itself, tending to shape the perceptions, thoughts, actions, classifications, and discourses of agents within a given field. In this sense, habitus is unified as part of the agent and cannot be divided but rather modified according to each field (political, religious, educational, etc.), revealing specific characteristics of habitus within a given field (political, professional, religious habitus, etc.).

Thus, discourse is historically forged from the social relations of interlocutors in their discursive practices. These practices tend to be reproduced or updated according to the immanent discursive rules of a non-static social context, whose discourse is incorporated into the habitus.

In this context, the sociologist departs from treating the discourse of language as an exclusively internal structure of mere execution, as in Ferdinand de Saussure (Saussure, 2017), and as an exclusively generative disposition, according to Noam Chomsky (Chomsky, 2005), to say that “[...] the social nature of language constitutes one of its internal characteristics [...] and that social heterogeneity is inherent to language” (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 19). Discourses are not ready-made data but are constructed by certain tendencies of language, which have been socially legitimized in the social world.

Thus, Bourdieu (2008a), in his work “The Economy of Linguistic Exchanges: What Speaking Means,” presents, in the sociological analysis of linguistic exchanges, an adaptation of his central notions on the theory of practice: habitus and field. There is no science of discourse without considering the social conditions (position of agents in the field and of the field itself) and the formal properties of discourse. In this sense, the author transposes the primary notions of his praxeology to discourse analysis.

Habitus, therefore, refers to tastes, sensations, ways of thinking, acting, and speaking as relatively (un)conscious mental schemes. These are durable and transferable dispositions, both structured and structuring, as they integrate the individual and social history of the agent as generating principles of practices, perpetuating themselves in the set of social relations of agents in the field (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1992; Bourdieu, 2003).

The notion of field concerns a microcosm of social space, constituting social structures with rules and laws governing the field's functioning, marked by a system of

struggles and disputes over objects of value (capital) present in this game of power relations. This causes distinctions between the dominant (those in charge in the field) and the dominated (those subjugated in the field). These positions are defined based on the social position of each agent in the field, whose changes are conditioned by the social structure and the dispositions (habitus) of the agents (Bourdieu, 2004).

Considering the understanding of language, Bourdieu (2008a) introduces the notion of linguistic habitus, referring to the notion of habitus as a disposition to say certain words to the detriment of others, incorporated into discourse. Furthermore, as an adaptation to the notion of field, he introduces the notion of linguistic market, a social structure that shapes the modes, styles, and discourses employed in a given social field.

Every speech act, and in general every action, is a conjuncture, an encounter of independent causal series: on the one hand, the socially shaped dispositions of linguistic habitus, which imply a certain propensity to speak and to say specific things (expressive interest), defined simultaneously as the linguistic capacity for the infinite generation of grammatically compliant discourses and as the social capacity that allows for the adequate use of this competence in a given situation; on the other hand, the structures of the linguistic market, which impose themselves as a system of specific sanctions and censorship (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 24).

For the theorist, linguistic exchanges are relations of symbolic power communication; that is, the discourse transmitted through language is considered a symbolic good. Therefore, “Discourses, rites, and doctrines constitute not only symbolic modalities of transfiguration of social reality, but above all, they order, classify, systematize, and represent the natural and social world” (Bourdieu, 2007, p. 60). Discourse is, then, a constitutive part of social reality in the field, restricted to the linguistic market that conditions the symbolization effect of discourse. The linguistic market, by imposing sanctions and censorship on ways of speaking, contributes to the formation of the meaning of discourse and to the diacritical and distinctive dispositions of speaking (linguistic habitus) (Bourdieu, 2008a).

It is worth noting that the rituals of school institutions, such as bonuses, awards, publicity, and accountability, characterize the performativity of learning outcomes disseminated in educational indicators, defining the symbolic differences between states, municipalities, schools, professionals, and students. In this school setting, beyond mere recognition, there is a symbolic (re)positioning between schools

with good results and schools without results, dividing them within the field based on social perceptions.

These rites produce lasting symbolic boundaries, legitimizing hierarchies and classifications that tend to naturalize social inequalities under the guise of academic merit. In this respect, the performative character of these rites lies precisely in their capacity to forge what they enunciate by naming, classifying, and consecrating differences. They not only describe school reality but also institute it, instilling representative dispositions and schemes that come to structure relationships and disputes within the school environment.

The meanings of words, therefore, are restricted to the interpretative relationship between the sender and receiver of the discourse, due to the existence of different linguistic communities in a society. Words naturalized in discourse, recurrent in the practices of agents, possess a linguistic polysemy shaped by the unification of the linguistic market. Thus, “There is nothing that can be said, and one can say nothing” (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 24), according to the generative capacities of language. The power of discourse (including the power to produce semantically empty discourse), in this sense, lies in the notion of legitimate linguistic competence: a statutory capacity attributed to a person recognized as capable of producing and using the legitimate language. It is not the language itself that possesses power, but the linguistic competence attributed to the agent as the speaker of the discourse.

Thus, a professional's power in the school setting depends not on the language itself, but on the institutional position granted to them, since discursive authority depends on the social condition given to the agent authorized to pronounce certain discourses, such as the right to speak on behalf of the school. Therefore, the effectiveness of the discourse of the State, the Department of Education, students, schools, and professionals (teachers, administrators, coordinators, etc.) depends on the position of locutionary authority occupied by the agent in that field.

According to Bourdieu (2008a, p. 63), “The symbolic efficacy of the discourse of authority always depends to some extent on the linguistic competence of the one who employs it, and all the more so, of course, when the speaker's authority is less clearly institutionalized.” The acceptance of the discourse by members of a field depends on the anticipation of the price (value) of the discourse in the linguistic market,

which is both a result and a condition of the linguistic habitus incorporated throughout the social trajectory, and which also conditions market censorship.

In terms of symbolic production, the conditioning exerted by the market through the anticipation of profit possibilities naturally takes the form of an anticipated censorship, a self-censorship, determining not only the way of saying, that is, the language choices - the code-switching of bilingual situations - or the 'level' of language, but also what can and cannot be said (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 65).

In this line of thought, discourses are conditioned by the rules of the linguistic market, which impose a process of euphemism, in which discourse is adjusted to the demands of the market's ways of speaking and to the censorship of the production of discursive practices, inherent to the holder of linguistic competence in the field. The censorship of the linguistic market operates in the silencing and pronouncement of the agents' discourse, determining the possibilities of what can be said and the mode of discursive enunciation.

According to Bourdieu (2008a), censorship is a result of the very structure of the field, which is exercised through field sanctions. Expressions and enunciations are imposed, even on the very spokespeople of the discourse and on the dominated, as a condition that restricts silencing or limits the available vocabulary. Its action is effective when the agents are previously objectified and authorized to speak and not to speak, according to the structure of the socialized linguistic market.

Therefore, there is a dialectical relationship between the agent's interests and censorship, insofar as subjects lacking legitimate linguistic competence are condemned to silence. This process of exclusion stems from the fact that they are distanced from the social heritage, a product of the relationships between agents, the position they occupy in the field, and the symbolic value attributed to speakers. Thus, only those considered to possess a symbolized linguistic capital are legitimized as authorized voices.

Bourdieu (2008a) understands linguistic capital as a unique dimension of concealed cultural capital. Language is the result of an incorporated habitus of semiotic signs concerning tone of voice, manner of speaking and gesticulation, timing of utterance, expressed content—that is, its corporeal hexis, which functions as an indicator of the agent's social position in the social field and distinguishes them from others. This linguistic habitus represents the practical state of internalization of

legitimate language. This notion, in turn, refers to all language use that goes beyond a correct way of speaking and achieves validation of the right to speak, of legitimate linguistic competence. Discourse and the process of enunciation are the objects of interest (Catani *et al.*, 2017).

This occurs because linguistic exchanges are also economic exchanges stemming from the symbolic forces involved, since discourses exceed the meaning of deciphered signs to become signs of wealth, appreciated and valued in the social field (Bourdieu, 2008a). Thus, practice, both political, ideological and pedagogical, is intertwined with the uttered discourse, as this is an instrument of expression and transformation of practices, which, when incorporated into the habitus, engenders dispositions in the structure of the field (Bourdieu, 2003, 2007).

This incorporation depends on the value given to discourse and its relationship with the linguistic market, which is characterized by laws governing the functioning of the discursive order (agents with linguistic competence capable of producing and agents willing to appreciate discourses).

When the objective structures with which one is confronted coincide with those of which one is a product, habitus anticipates the objective demands of the field. This is the basis of the most frequent and most hidden form of censorship, which is to place in positions with the right to speak agents endowed with expressive dispositions that are previously 'censored' because they coincide with the demands inscribed in the position (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 72).

This act of granting power to agents (delegated power of spokesperson), previously endowed with dispositions which are censored by the objective structure of the linguistic market, manifests itself through institutional rites. It refers to a process that “[...] tends to consecrate or legitimize, that is, to make an arbitrary limit unrecognized as legitimate and to recognize it as legitimate and natural” (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 98). Therefore, the dispositions are structured in the linguistic market and engendered within the social relations of communication.

The rite enshrines differences and enables the incorporation of an understanding of the properties and symbolic capital of agents as natural, even if they are social classifications. This occurs, for example, when professional value is attributed to an agent with a higher education degree for hiring, or when acts of social investiture, such as political, educational, and professional ones, provide symbolic power to the holders of this symbolic capital, based on a validated consensual

discourse. These rites can be carried out by the social consensus of a group and by institutional discourse, particularly when the State or the school legitimizes these agents. The effectiveness of the discourse and the institutional ritual depends solely on the willingness of the agents to recognize this act of naming.

Discourses are symbolic significations, a product of practices that only take effect in the field because they are compatible with the generating principles of the practice (*habitus*) and with the objective conditions of the social structure (*field*), allowing its functioning within the ideologically and historically constituted system (Bourdieu, 2007). The agent's discourse is not merely an epiphenomenon of the social world, but the very symbol of this system of social representation.

In social practice, such criteria (for example, language, dialect or accent) constitute the object of mental representations—that is to say, of acts of perception and appreciation, of knowledge and recognition, in which agents invest their interests and assumptions—and of object representations, things (emblems, flags, insignia, etc.) or acts, interested strategies of symbolic manipulation tending to determine the (mental) representation that others can construct regarding both these properties and their bearers (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 108).

In this context, discourse is a mental and objective representation of the symbolic power relations of the social structure. It refers to the perceptions of agents, resulting from an internalization of the social and an externalization of the individual. When discourse is imposed, it becomes an act of symbolic violence, as it legitimizes those who produce it, and the content of what has been produced is the thinking basis of a group or social theme (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1992).

Symbolic violence constitutes a subtle and gentle way in which domination is imposed and reproduced on the dominated, including relations of domination accepted as natural and inscribed in the dispositions of a social group. Symbolic domination, in turn, refers to a (reasonably consolidated) power structure in which agents are classified and hierarchized through symbolic violence, that is, through a form of (self-)exclusion, (self-)classification, and (self-)coercion of the dominated in their incorporated linguistic and social meanings.

Therefore, the State acts as an enforcer of a legitimate language and an officially accepted discourse in the educational field, creating the conditions for the development of a linguistic market that is required in official situations (schools, public institutions, political entities, etc.). In the case of schools, teachers act as agents of

imposition and control of the legitimate language and dissemination of the State's official discourse, provided they are predisposed to accept the social conditions for the circulation of this discourse.

The teacher, in teaching a language and through language, structures the thinking basis of the school and the students, reproducing or transforming preconceived ideas in the school setting – a microcosm of the educational social space marked by agents (school professionals, students, family, etc.), positions (education department, school management, teaching staff, quality school, school without results, etc.) and capital (results in assessments, knowledge, number of enrollments, etc.). Within it, the agents compete for the title of school quality, through results, attention, and students, whose symbolic forms of consecration take the form of awards, bonuses, and recognition.

Thus, while the school setting is the social structure that delimits the actions of teachers by social positions, the linguistic market is the structure of discursive regulation in which discourses circulate and are validated, classified, and legitimized within the school setting, based on the use of a language predetermined for acceptable communication within that setting. In this respect, performativity in the linguistic market is considered to position the discourse of goals, results, productivity, and excellence as a vocabulary of value within the school setting.

Certainly, the time dedicated to school, over several years in the student's formation, since it occurs slowly and over a prolonged period, leads to the social recognition of a discourse, legitimizing it as a norm of expression and social representation, and inscribing it in a practical sense of acquired dispositions (Bourdieu, 2008b). It is a code of injunctions that acts silently in the constitution of the habitus of agents, in their expressions and enunciations. Discursive practice, which includes a bodily hexis to say something or remain silent on certain subjects and in a given situation, is related to a habitus predisposed to feel it as official truth, since it holds a symbolic power of legitimate recognition of enunciation.

In this dynamic, when discussing a particular topic, educational agents appropriate a pre-established discourse, selected from among others that are constructed and uttered in the school environment. This discursive process is incorporated into the professional habitus of educators, as it integrates into work

routines and daily practices. In this way, such statements remain subject to the rules and logics of operation inherent to educational systems.

That being said, it is understood that Discourse Analysis must consider the social conditions of (re)production of discourse, since understanding Bourdieu's discursive practice corresponds to the analysis of the linguistic market (field of discourse production), the habitus of the agents (speakers of the discourse), and the very form and content of the discourse (linguistic habitus). To operationalize an analysis of discursive practices with Bourdieu, it is necessary to work with the main notions of his praxeological method: habitus and field, in a relational sociology with discourses.

Bourdieu's analyses employ a threefold analytical framework focused on discourse, the field of (re)production, and the habitus of agents. This theoretical-analytical scheme incorporates other notions because it comprises Bourdieu's relational framework on discourses, which have been briefly presented as linguistic habitus, linguistic market, linguistic capital, legitimate linguistic competence, rites of institution, and censorship. On the other hand, other notions explored in the sociologist's works, such as symbolic capital, symbolic power, and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1989, 2002, 2004), are associated with the effectiveness of discourses.

3 The theoretical and methodological approach of the research in light of Pierre Bourdieu

The investigation was conducted using Pierre Bourdieu's praxeological method, which proposes articulating structure and agency in understanding social practices. Thus, the study focused on secondary education in the state of Piauí, taking as a subfield a state public school located in the interior of the state that historically shows low results in large-scale external assessments. The central objective was to understand how the logic of performativity is disseminated in daily school life and reproduced in the discourse of teachers working in this space.

The research participants were six high school teachers from the state school system, selected based on a fundamental criterion: having at least three years of experience at the school under investigation. This requirement stemmed from Bourdieu's (2002) concept of habitus, according to which incorporated dispositions demand a social history and a prolonged period of experience to be constituted. In the

context of rural public schools, where many teachers are on temporary contracts of up to two years, this criterion aimed to ensure greater empirical consistency for the analysis. The selection prioritized teachers with more stable career paths and those linked to the daily life of the institution.

The analysis focused on the professional habitus of teachers, understood as a set of dispositions incorporated into the exercise of the profession, encompassing routines, practices, and perceptions constructed throughout the subjects' school and professional trajectory (Perrenoud, 1993). In this sense, the investigation sought to understand how such dispositions are articulated with the teachers' discourse on large-scale assessments, revealing tensions between the performative logic and the reality of the investigated school field.

To gather the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers, recorded, and subsequently transcribed, in order to capture the meanings attributed to external evaluations. The interviews took place in 2023, during a week of work at the school.

In order to ensure the ethical integrity of the research, the professors signed the Informed Consent Form and were not identified in the study to preserve the confidentiality and secrecy of the interviewees, guaranteeing greater security in communication and exemption from registration and evaluation in the system of the Research Ethics Committee/National Research Ethics Commission (CEP/Conep). The interviews were only conducted after the purpose and origin of the research were explained to the participants.

The choice of the interview as a data collection instrument is justified by the fact that, from a Bourdieusian perspective, it constitutes a legitimate way of understanding the discourse of the agents, allowing access to socially constructed representations (Bourdieu, 2007, 2008b). To ensure confidentiality, the teachers were identified with the codes P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P6, without direct reference to the school.

In addition to the interviews, official documents and public speeches from the Department of Education of the State of Piauí (Seduc-PI), available on institutional websites, were analyzed. The use of these sources aimed to relate the teachers' statements to the dominant discursive formulations in the state's educational field,

establishing connections between the official discourse and its repercussions in the school environment.

As mentioned, the discourse analysis was based on Bourdieu's (2008a) threefold model, articulating the structure of the linguistic market, which defines the conditions of production and circulation of discourse; the professional habitus of teachers, as speakers situated in a specific field; and the linguistic habitus, expressed in the form and content of the utterances. This framework made it possible to understand discursive practices as an expression of the articulation between social structures and embodied dispositions.

In this process, it becomes evident that performativity acts as a political technology that guides and regulates ways of speaking. This dynamic shows how it materializes and becomes naturalized in teachers' discourse.

4 Discourse analysis on the large-scale assessment of the National High School Exam (Enem)

The school in question is part of the state education system and is located in the interior of Piauí, in a municipality with a low economic development index, a small population (less than 5,000 inhabitants), and low-income students (monthly income of up to one minimum wage). Based on educational indicators produced by large-scale assessments, the school has low results in the National High School Exam (Enem), with average proficiency scores below 500.

The interviewees' statements revealed a discursive dependence between the teachers' discourse on large-scale assessment policy and the official discourse of the state education system. This relationship was evident in the recurring mentions of the role of the State Department of Education (Seduc) as the main formulator of educational policy. The absence of a school-specific project reinforces its direct alignment with the guidelines of the state education system.

According to educational indicators, the school under study shows poor results in the National High School Exam (Enem), with average proficiency scores below five hundred points. In this context, the interviews revealed a strong discursive dependence between the school and the State Department of Education (Seduc-PI). The teachers' statements reveal that the institution does not formulate its own preparation projects, reproducing the initiatives proposed by the state network.

P1 - The school doesn't have a project per se, but the state (referring to Seduc) organizes the review sessions; we've even had students go to Teresina. They're now doing an in-person one, which has three or so... kind of like a review, it's a state-run event in general, and the students from here usually go (P1, 2023).

P2 – The school participates in the Seduc projects, Pré-Enem, we provide the link for them to watch the classes on the education channel and prepare for the assessments (P2, 2023).

In this context, it is understood that the school's educational discourse and the implementation of large-scale assessments are linked to the discourse of the state network, as the policy formulator, and to the discourse associated with assessments, in a kind of inertia on the part of the school, due to the legitimate linguistic competence given to the State Department of Education (Seduc) as the school's representative body. It is clear that preparatory policy is preponderant in the context of external assessments, as the network's discourse is internalized within the school's discourse. Examples of this are the discourses of Seduc-PI disseminated by the state network:

Secretary of Education - We have several pedagogical actions aimed at preparing for the National High School Exam (Enem). These include more in-person and virtual reviews using our digital platforms, and various awards for our students with the best results in the Enem, National Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb), and Knowledge Olympiads. The expectation is that our students will achieve even more impressive results, because those who do well in the Saeb will do well in the Enem (Melo, 2023).

Therefore, the State Department of Education of Piauí (Seduc-PI), through the Secretary of Education, acts as the holder of the legitimate linguistic competence of the school, because the school tends to accept and conform to the policies and discourses of the state network. Its actions, its role, its policies, and its discourse are shaped according to the guidelines of the network itself, which holds the linguistic capital of the educational discourse, based on a preparatory policy for the National High School Exam (Enem) assessments.

In the network's discourse, a strong pedagogical influence is observed, establishing a correlation between student performance on the National Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb) and performance on the National High School Exam (Enem). This link is presented as the central purpose of the state's educational actions, legitimized by the discursive authority of both the governor and the secretary of education. Thus, the institutional discourse aligns directly with the current governmental strategies.

Governor - We are excited and I believe we are heading in the right direction. The goal is for Piauí to become a benchmark, not only in Brazil, but throughout the world. The Piauí of the future has arrived (Piauí, 2023).

Secretary of Education - In Piauí, our focus is also on excellence. We are investing in technology and in various actions to strengthen education, such as Acelera Seduc, which we recently launched. With these initiatives and applying successful experiences like the one we learned about here in Estonia, we will move forward so that our state has the best public education in the country (Piauí, 2023).

The state's large-scale assessment policy is used to define the direction of the network's educational proposal, which, according to those who hold legitimate linguistic expertise, is centered on the proficiency levels of the assessments as the equivalent of the state's educational quality. Therefore, having "the best public education in the country" and becoming a national and international "reference" constitutes a policy consistent with performativity in the management of educational policy.

This focus on results, as the center of management and action, is solidified by a state policy preparing students for the National High School Exam (Enem), which is also reflected in the school's political-pedagogical document, whose goals are: to offer quality education; to improve scores on external tests (Saeb; Enem); and to prepare students for entry into higher education.

Thus, the State Department of Education of Piauí (Seduc-PI) possesses a discourse easily incorporated through its constant presence in the field, which acts as censorship of the linguistic market, determining the discourse and discussions that permeate the school environment, and focusing on raising student performance results and, consequently, those of the state. This can be observed in the following statements:

P4 - We participate in training programs with the goal that the student will actually be interested, right? And be able to access a higher education course, so that they don't stop studying, so that they get an education (laughs) (P4, 2023).

P6 - We meet with the teachers, ask them to work on this (referring to the assessments), to take some time, because we need this support. We discuss strategies to get results, because today the result is important (affirmative facial expression). – We have time for planning, but it's difficult... I work in two schools to be able to cover the expenses [...] (P6, 2023).

The performative discourse of the state network reaches rural schools in the sense of changes in the valuation of results. When it is said that "[...] today the result is important" (P6, 2023), there is an affirmation that this discourse has been

incorporated into schools as symbolic violence of a performative neoliberal discourse, in which the result of external evaluations constitutes the symbol and object of interest of the school field, that is, the symbolic capital valued in the field (Bourdieu, 2002). This censorship tends to overshadow other broader discussions of student education, because the efforts, goals, and discourses emphasize these results as the symbolic value of education.

This is evidenced in one of the statements, which says: “[...] our students, they don't want to study, they want to spend the day riding horses, they are not very interested, they think that studying is not so important” (P6, 2023). This fragment reveals a distinction between the objectives of the network's political-pedagogical discourse, incorporated into the manifested social reality. The reality of these young people can contribute to maintaining the structure of inequalities in educational opportunities, since the tendency is for poorer young people from rural areas to be less encouraged to study than more privileged young people from urban centers (Bourdieu; Passeron, 1992; Bourdieu, 2007). This scenario is emphasized by a homogeneous discourse of results, despite these social conditions.

The results of these evaluations, by inserting terms such as "results," "performance," "Enem" (Brazilian National High School Exam), "demand," "highlight," "excellence," and "best" into educational discourse, contribute to the internalization of the linguistic capital of the school field, through a language guided by the desires of performativity as a pedagogical value of the school. The teacher, when saying “[...] I demand a lot from myself personally and the school also demands too much, because today what matters is numbers, results, right?” (P3, 2023), highlights that the use of performative language has become the dominant linguistic capital of the school, especially when it comes to the quality of education and educational goals.

Furthermore, the State Department of Education of Piauí (Seduc-PI) establishes certain institutional rites as a strategy to strengthen performative discourse in the state's schools. This institutional act of network recognition is proposed to establish discursive authorities among the schools and their own internal core, based on social appreciation. Among these mechanisms, the network recently proposed a state bonus policy based on student performance in large-scale assessments.

Based on this bonus policy, the state of Piauí will award monetary prizes to the 50 students with the best National High School Exam (Enem) scores from state public

schools. These prizes are equivalent to the value of a minimum wage for the student's performance as an incentive to achieve the result. There is also an award for gold medalists in the National Knowledge Olympics for Public Schools (Piauí, 2023).

Governor of the state - It is a recognition of best practices, of students who dedicate themselves more, and it is an important incentive for us to further qualify the teaching-learning process in Piauí schools, so that our students can achieve ever greater heights in their future professional lives. So, this is how we will transform Piauí into a national reference in basic education (Pedrosa; Gomes, 2023).

Secretary of Education - It is a recognition of merit, and at the same time, an incentive, a stimulus for our students to dedicate themselves more and more to their studies and to the schools so that they have an increasingly better pedagogical and administrative management, always seeking excellence (Pedrosa; Gomes, 2023).

The state concretizes the rite of social institution based on students' performance in external assessments, awarding a social and economic bonus for the levels of proficiency achieved. This act contributes to the valorization of results as symbolic capital for the agents, since the state, as a discursive authority, emits an institutional discourse that capitalizes on the results.

Beyond the institutional ritual on the part of the state government, there is a social institutional ritual based on the naming of schools and students based on results, disseminated through social media such as Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook, and the official websites of the State Department of Education (Seduc) and the government of Piauí. These platforms stimulate symbolic exchanges through virtual discourse, creating a promotional language for the performance of individuals and schools that achieve high levels in evaluations. A need for social approval is established on social media, with the exchange of reactions, emoticons, and virtual comments, present in the symbolic relationships established by the signs of virtual language.

P3 – There's a lot of advertising on the network (laughs), a campaign about results and achieving goals, when the school achieves that, we appear on social media (P3, 2023).

P4 – The school publicizes the results, Seduc itself publishes them on the official website and on Instagram; it's just a form of recognition (P4, 2023).

According to the teachers, there is no internal competition for results, but there is competition between schools in the network, due to the social recognition given by the State Department of Education (Seduc), including as a parameter related to the allocation of resources.

P4 - I think that in a way this competition between cities is even natural, but this competition leads to a certain vanity on the part of the school that presents the best grades, especially in the essay grade (P4, 2023).

P5 – I believe so. It does exist. With regard to schools, it's even more noticeable when a parent is going to enroll their child. And when the school has good results, that school also wins an award from the state (P5, 2023).

P6 – There is strong competition to achieve these results because, among other things, it's a reason for the school to receive more resources; when the school meets the goals, it is much more visible within the network, right? (P6, 2023).

Thus, the school field becomes objectified within a quasi-school market (Ball, 2014), because the results of schools in these external evaluations are used as a criterion for attracting families, this being evidence of school quality. As a result, as presented by one of the teachers, schools with better results end up becoming "vain" with the publicity, distancing themselves from other schools that do not present such results. This is a process of social exclusion between schools, because good results place a school in a position of prestige, while distancing others from this social and governmental appreciation, placing them as the excluded ones from the interior (Bourdieu; Champagne, 2007).

The teachers interviewed, as shown in Table 1, have a considerable amount of experience working in rural schools, which is essential for habitus (Bourdieu, 2002): a work routine in more than one school in order to cover family expenses; they teach subjects beyond their area of expertise to supplement their workload; and they claim not to receive the minimum wage for their profession, with two teachers being contract workers (P2 and P5) and four being tenured (P1, P3, P4 and P6).

Table 1 – Professional data of the teachers interviewed.

Interviewee	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Training	Physics Professor	Portuguese teacher	Portuguese teacher, EJA (Youth and Adult Education).	Prof. math. coordinator EJA	Prof. coord.	Professor of Chemistry, Manager
Age	34	54	50	52	31	44
Length of service at school	12 years	5 years	6 years	16 years old	6 years	+10 years
Number of schools where he/she teaches	2	2	2	2	1	2

Subjects taught	Physics, Mathematics, and Advanced Chemistry Track	Portuguese Elective and Life Project.	Portuguese, Sociology, Philosophy, Life Project	Mathematics sociology	Sociology, Philosophy, Physics, Geography, History	Chemistry Biology
Routine in favor of evaluations	Questions on the test, exercises in class, encouragement simulated	Questions on the test, exercises in class. simulated	Skills exploration, writing, exam questions, encouragement, mock exam	Questions on the test simulated	Questions on the test, encouragement, exercises in class. Simulated	Questions on the test, incentive Simulated

Source: Authors' elaboration based on research data.

These teachers have a lenient work routine regarding large-scale assessments, limiting themselves to offering basic preparation for this type of test, since they have few resources to develop work specifically focused on assessments. According to them, there is almost no time for planning because they need to work in several schools.

P4 - We have time for planning, but it's difficult [...] like I told you, I work at two schools to be able to cover expenses [...] so only the weekends are left, but we manage, right? (P4, 2023).

These are teachers whose basic education trajectories were similar to the schools where they work, and whose choice of teaching location is linked to geographical proximity and an interest in remaining close to their families of origin, as they did not internalize the need to work in schools focused on results. Therefore, they were not accustomed to working towards that goal, since their choice of teaching was based on preserving values and places solidified in their social and family life.

P1 - At the time, the test was for here, it's close to where I live, it's a quiet and good place for us to work, I had already studied in the municipality and worked as a CLT employee, so it was easier to come here (P1, 2023).

P5 - I chose this school because it's close to where I live, so it's easier for me to commute and work (P5, 2023).

P6 - It's a school that's close to where I used to work, it's a small, calm and organized city, when the job posting opened I thought it was a good opportunity (P6, 2023).

In the teachers' discourse, a compatibility is perceived between the social field of work and the educational trajectory of these professionals. This means that the perception constituting their subjectivity finds similarities between the objective conditions of the school where they work and the interests forged in the disadvantaged

local context, since, at the time of their schooling, they possessed low economic and social power. In this sense, the teaching practice focused on large-scale assessments appears mild, since the school reality and the professional habitus of the teachers do not show a predisposition for practices oriented towards performativity. A focus on these results is evident in the discourse and practices, but with a less focused teaching action, due to the objective conditions of the rural school setting.

P2 – we work with the students, but many of them don't care about Enem, Saeb, etc., they barely want to attend classes, there is a lack of interest from them in school (teacher crosses his hands and opens them again, in the sense of "we try, but it's difficult") (P2, 2023).

P6 – This year, we want to work more on this because we need to have these results, but our school doesn't have many, our students are more disinterested, there's a lot of indiscipline because they think that since their parents don't have much schooling, they don't need to either. Look, one day I was giving them an essay and they didn't even know how to talk about the topic, it's sad (feeling of discouragement and sadness) (P6, 2023).

The social reality of rural schools clashes with the current values of results-oriented educational proposals, placing them at a disadvantage. This condition relates to the notion of the periphery as a space distant from "good" results, with scattered and undisciplined students, lack of student attention, overworked, thoughtful and tired professionals, short school trajectories for students with low dispositions for studies, and distant from the politics and discourse of results proposed by the state.

This context places the school and teachers in an inferior and dominated position within the discourse of results-oriented schools. They are professionals subject to the discursive rules of performative discourse because they lack the capacity to go against the dominant language (Bourdieu, 2008a). They are situated in a school lacking results and attention, given that its social and pedagogical issues are different and do not align with the assumptions of performativity. Despite this, they end up incorporating this discourse because they are not recognized as possessing the dominant linguistic competence in the school setting, but rather as censored within the linguistic marketplace of performativity.

In discourse, results are invested with a symbolic value that integrates the process of domination exercised through discursive symbolic violence, insofar as teachers come to recognize and appreciate the results through the linguistic and symbolic exchanges of the discourse legitimized as dominant (Bourdieu, 2007).

P2 - We always try to work towards Saeb, Enem, we try to choose textbooks, seeing if they have questions from these assessments, to show them to them right away, because this result is important for the student and for the school (P2, 2023).

P1 – Back when I was studying, I didn't have this much focus on it, but today it's important for us to encourage and help them with these exams, because without our help it's more difficult and there are so many exams, so we have to do something (P1, 2023).

Given this, an updated professional habitus is acquired, in accordance with the educational needs of the school field. Teachers differ from the current discourse of state educational policy, but, through social contact with the valued discourse, they tend to modify their practices and perceptions based on the results, seeking recognition in the field.

These professionals are products of the social reproduction of their educational trajectory in a field close to the current context. Therefore, they tend to maintain a position of discursive inferiority in the structured linguistic market. Current language does not offer space for other discourses to take center stage in management and results-oriented practices, especially in an educational scenario constituted by large-scale assessments focused on the National High School Exam (Enem).

What these speakers tend to do is reproduce discourses, given their low social position in a performative school setting and the influence of the network and the teachers' agreement with the discourse of the State Department of Education. This perception is what makes them be seen as interlocutors in the field, given their social pedagogical function in solidifying discourses and practices through repetitive and daily contact throughout the school year. They receive the performative discourse and reproduce it in the micro-space of the school in the interior to perpetuate this discourse in various environments and social spaces, even if they are censored in the discourse. Therefore, the power of language lies in the social symbol achieved (Bourdieu, 2007, 2008a).

When discussing large-scale assessments, teachers reveal a practical “consensus” (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 25) regarding the collective interest that this model assumes in the school setting. This consensus manifests itself in the automatic meanings attributed to the term “large-scale assessment,” which is immediately

associated with educational outcomes. Thus, the use of the expression acquires a semantic equivalence that naturalizes its centrality in educational discourse.

P1 - Large-scale assessments are used to show the results of the school and the students, to see what they know and have learned. They are used to give rewards and opportunities. We've always had to go through this, haven't we? (P1, 2023).

P6 – today these assessments like Enem are important for the school and the students, right? Because for Seduc, they signify the quality of the school, they prepare them for the selections, right? Showing this effort of theirs, right? So (opens hands indicating a conclusive effect of justification) (P6, 2023).

The contingency between large-scale assessment and results stems from the assumption that this performative discourse is accentuated by the social condition of teachers, who act as recipients of the Seduc's discourse. Therefore, there is a willingness to accept the discourse, within a relationship of symbolic power imposition. A meaning of opportunities and preparation is given that is historically incorporated by teachers into their school experiences: "we've always had to go through this, haven't we?" (P1, 2023).

The form and information conveyed in the discourse, through the use of expressions such as "right?" or "so," demonstrate a model of politeness associated with illocutionary force, that is, the ability to recognize the agents' positions in the communicative interaction. This linguistic resource functions as a strategy for the interlocutor's rhetorical discursive participation, while simultaneously confirming the need for social approval implicit in the speech. In this sense, it constitutes a process of euphemization of discourse, as Bourdieu (2008a) points out.

According to Bourdieu (2008a, p. 70), "the effects of experiences on habitus depend on the practical 'compatibility' relationship between these experiences and others already integrated into habitus in the form of production and appreciation schemes." Thus, in Table 2, we seek to demonstrate the relationship of meanings between the speakers' discourse and their productions and appreciations regarding large-scale evaluation.

Table 2 – Recurring order of meanings in the discourse about the Enem evaluation

SEMANTIC AXIS					
	Sense	Educational use	Related terms	Meaning of the results	Opposition
Enem	Preparing students for higher education	Training	Leading role; Higher education; Success professional.	Opportunities for students to continue their studies.	It prioritizes Portuguese and mathematics.

Source: Authors' elaboration based on research data.

The meanings attributed to the National High School Exam (Enem) find a discursive symmetry based on the symbolic value given to the results, insofar as these operate as symbolic capital capable of generating social and economic advantages for school agents (teachers, administrators, and students), in addition to supporting a pedagogical use restricted to exam preparation, far removed from a contribution to teaching practice. The results, however, have a negative symbolic effect on teachers because “our school doesn’t have good results” (P6, 2023), “unfortunately, the student’s result is also the teacher’s result” (P1, 2023). The rural school maintains a position of being a school without positive results for the network.

Among the arguments against large-scale assessments, criticisms were found regarding the National High School Exam (Enem) for prioritizing Portuguese and mathematics, giving them privilege over others. Furthermore, in their perception, there is an obsession with assessment: “there are so many assessments, we don't even know what to do (laughs), imagine the students” (P4, 2023). Despite the incorporation of assessment policy in the state, a timid discourse against it is identified, which is censored by the rules of the linguistic market of results (Bourdieu, 2008a).

Another opposing discursive content that emerged was the teachers' criticism of the practice of passing students regardless of the observed learning flow. The following statements were made: “the students haven't learned and we have to pass them” (P4, 2023), “there are students who can't even read properly, but the system says they have to pass, so as not to lower their grades” (P3, 2023). These statements reveal a practice of automatic student approval based on Ideb results, placing quality learning in second place.

This consensual discursive norm removes the teacher's pedagogical autonomy as an evaluator of learning quality, focusing instead on increasing results and obtaining government funding. There is a shift in the educational paradigm, where the focus moves from students to results, due to the competition for symbolic and

economic capital within the educational system, sustained by a linguistic market engendered by neoliberal policies.

However, the tone of the discourse is guided by a conformist reception of performative discourse, since the teachers have incorporated this logic into their discourse and as an important element of their teaching practice, considering the state's educational discourse. Although they present negative feelings regarding the results, the dissemination of the discourse prevails in the teachers' practice.

P2 – when the result is negative, we also get sad because we know that we also have a specific role to play in it. The student's defeat is also the teacher's defeat (P2, 2023).

P3 - We try to stimulate them, we do exercises, we encourage them to participate in the network's Pre-Enem and Pre-Saeb review classes, but they have difficulty getting interested in it (P3, 2023).

The tone of the discourse of teachers in a rural school, lacking profitable results for the social relations of symbolic power, conceives these results as negative, since the school does not possess them. There is a lament, an evident frustration, as the discourse is imbued with complaints, justifications, and apathy regarding the results. The effects of the evaluations on the discourse reveal this deteriorated perception of learning and the work performed, since they pressure socially disadvantaged schools to seek idealized results, distant from their position in the linguistic market (Bourdieu, 2007). This is how the dynamics of the market work, through an insatiable search for a symbolic value, legitimized as essential for education.

Thus, the words used and the body language reveal a supposed discursive inferiority of a group of teachers who perceive themselves as not very successful in converting their practices into results-oriented actions. This perception is attributed to the students' deficit in cultural capital and their dispositions, considered insufficient to achieve high performance. Therefore, the responsibility for overcoming these limitations is shifted to the teacher, silencing other social determinants that also condition such results (Bourdieu, 1989).

P1 – Performance depends a lot on how the year goes. For example, if a student misses a lot of class, then... because at home we know that few students manage to study or want to study, right? So poor results are sometimes (emphasizes the term sometimes) due to a lack of class time, also student interest, and sometimes on the part of the teacher who perhaps doesn't try to focus on something that might be more relevant, right? (P1, 2023).

P5 - 50% yes, because if the teacher doesn't perform, if they don't plan, the student is already demotivated and then there isn't a good result. In this case, for the student to start from their own, it would be more difficult to have good performance, right? Than with the teacher helping (P5, 2023).

This derogatory discourse surrounding the results reveals a shift in responsibility from state education to schools and teachers. This dynamic expresses external pressure that demands teachers solve problems beyond their formative capabilities. Among these factors are family and economic issues, as well as cultural and social inequalities that condition the educational process.

In this linguistic market, teachers are pressured by market rules and linguistic correctness, leading them to structure their discourse according to the standards of official occasions, prioritizing results and their recognition within the school environment. They adopt the language of the dominated, of those held hostage by the educational power of the state, hypercorrecting the discursive language of the dominated in order to appropriate the discursive properties of domination of the Seduc (Bourdieu, 2008a).

The power of state discourse, emanating from large-scale assessments, leads teachers to adopt a practice of professorial judgment that assigns blame for school failure. Therefore, they either blame, in part, themselves, such as "sometimes we didn't do a good job" (P1, 2023), or the students, finding cognitive factors such as "they are not interested" (P6, 2023), "they have difficulties, they don't even know what this is" (P5, 2023), transforming social classifications into school classifications.

The symbolic power of discourse lies in this "non-recognition-recognition" of the social reality of the school, in a transposition from the objective structure to the mental structure, subject to the censorship of language formulated by the discourse of performativity as a product of teaching action (Bourdieu; Saint-Martin, 2007, p. 198).

This symbolic function of the dominant discourse imputes the difficulties of the school system to the professionals. According to Bourdieu (2008b), it contributes to the demoralization of teachers due to the negative content of the discourse ("it's sad", "there was some failure"), based on the concentration of social and educational problems in the most disadvantaged places. The performativity in the discursive practice of teachers in schools legitimized as "without results", expressed in embodied language, is internalized in the bodily hexis, placing the agents in internal conflict with their own profession.

There is a sensitivity to the objective-subjective tension of the performative linguistic market, marked by a recognition and knowledge of the structured code in favor of large-scale assessments. Therefore, there is a certain insecurity in pointing out flaws or criticisms of the results-oriented education model because, from the dominant point of view, it means going against the linguistic norm realized from an anti-quality discourse, a devalued, defective language, and one that is disoriented from the neoliberal sense.

Therefore, according to Bourdieu (2008a, p. 71), those who are dominated are left with “[...] escape through abstention and silence, lacking the conditions to impose the freedoms of fluent speech, strictly reserved for internal or domestic use [...]”, because they borrow the language of the dominant discourse. These relations of symbolic power, exercised by neoliberal discourse, engender censored incorporations, as performativity, as legitimate discourse, becomes incorporated into the professional teaching habitus, which anticipates the demands of the linguistic market.

There is no imposed silencing, but rather one apprehended in the process of imposing power between the Department of Education and the school:

The close correspondence between the uses of the body, language, and undoubtedly also time, stems from the fact that it is essentially through bodily and linguistic disciplines and censures, which frequently imply a temporal rule, that groups inculcate virtues as a transfigured form of their need, and that the 'choices' constitutive of a relationship with the economic and social world are incorporated in the form of lasting assemblies and subtracted, at least in part, from the shackles of consciousness and will (Bourdieu, 2008a, p. 78).

In this respect, the durability and continuity of the discourse, present in different school settings, whether real or virtual, reinforce the symbolic force of the prevailing discourse on results-oriented assessment policy. This reinforcement occurs through repetition and habitual practice by the agents, who sustain and legitimize such statements. Even in the face of some discursive oppositions, time and the consolidation of these practices structure and maintain the logic of the linguistic market.

5 Conclusion

Analyzing the discourses, under Bourdieu's sociology, made it possible to understand that the meanings attributed to large-scale assessments are incorporated through a process of symbolic violence, of a dominant language over the discourse of the state education network of Piauí. This incorporation occurs through institutional

rites of recognition, reward, and social naming, present in symbolic power relations and in a consensual discourse structured in professional relationships. The basis of this lies in the structure of the linguistic market of performativity, through the discourse of State Department of Education (Seduc), an authority recognized as the holder of legitimate linguistic competence, whose valued linguistic capital is centered on proficiency results, this being the focus of professional action.

Performativity, in the linguistic habitus of teachers, leads to a silencing and censorship of those who are dominated and who do not possess dominant discursive authority. The logic of performativity in large-scale assessments causes the forgetting of the rural school, labeled "without results" in performative language. It does not appear in the media, does not receive attention from the education system, families, and students, who do not seek it out. They are not remembered by teachers, as they do not see them as a destination, going to them for social, familial, spatial, or professional convenience.

The discourses reveal perverse consequences of performativity, because discursive practices are designed for the school to be performative and not for interventions in social conditions, so that, in the future, they may have the conditions to exist, to have the result as a consequence and not as the sole end. Performativity in rural schools causes a stigmatizing effect on teaching discursive practice, with a pejorative sentimental and professional value of exclusion, as it demands an automated process of producing results in a field unwilling to have them.

Therefore, the rhetoric of performativity in teachers' discourse is configured as a process of incorporating, into the linguistic habitus, the discourse socially legitimized by the results of proficiency, performance, protagonism, individual merit, and the valorization of being the best. The results constitute the symbolic capital of the school field, structured by a linguistic market in which linguistic capital is expressed through performative language, appreciated and valued in symbolic discourse.

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