

Homeschooling and brazilian education under siege in the domestic interior



<https://doi.org/10.56238/ptoketheeducati-012>

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses homeschooling in Brazil and presents the consequences of its approval in the legal statute of national education for public policies, as well as for the effectiveness of the social function of basic education institutions. It starts with the Critical Theory of Society as a theoretical-methodological framework to analyze the recent approval of homeschooling in the Chamber of Deputies, which is currently being considered by the Federal Senate. Preliminary research results point to the advance of conservative groups on Brazilian public education, besieging educational processes within the bourgeoisie that degrade sociability and make the experience of young people and children unfeasible, whose consequence

in the medium and long term is narcissistic and solipsistic formation. This process further aggravates the framework of semi-formation [Halbbildung] instituted by modernity, analyzed by Theodoro Adorno and Walter Benjamin, in relation to the decay of narrative, experience [Erfahrung] and communicability, giving way to the trivialities of experiences [Erlebnis] each increasingly lonely, making a liberating and emancipatory education unfeasible. Thus, homeschooling is conceived as a phenomenon derived from the increasingly accentuated process of interiorization of bourgeois society, which retracts to the private sphere one of the most important achievements of the liberal revolutions: the modern universal public school. This phenomenon deepens the crisis of Brazilian education, suffocated by neoliberal reforms that, in recent decades, have caused a retraction in public investments and made its conditions for expansion and qualification even more precarious.

Keywords: Homeschooling, Conservative education, Bourgeois interior, Experience, “Experience”.

1 INTRODUCTION

Following the regressive tendencies and neoliberal guidelines to meet the interests of the market, Brazilian education has been the target of constant attacks in order to conform it to the ideology of the flexible mode of production. Since the publication of the current Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education, Law No. 9394/96, "reformist" groups, aligned with neoliberal interests, have become hegemonic in the elaboration and approval of public policies aligned with what Saviani (2011) calls neoproductivism, that is, with a perspective of adaptation of national education to the regime of production and accumulation of Toyota, materialized in the discourses of "total quality", "skills", "flexibility", etc. In fact, the National Common Curricular Base (BNCC) for basic education and the National Common Base – Training (BNCC-Formation) are nothing other than the practical implementation in school curricula of the pedagogical of competences, whose bases are the dogmas of the administrative and productive reengineering of the last decades.



In the set of these (neo)conservative and (neo)liberal attacks, we saw in 2022 the approval of *homeschooling* or homeschooling, something hitherto not allowed by educational legislation. Still in the approval phase in the Federal Senate, the law of home education presents itself as a real obstacle to the development of national education, as well as to the development of children and adolescents, as we will argue below.

The present work is part of a broader research project, entitled "Current Events of the Critical Theory of Society for Contemporary Educational *Thought: Bildung* and *Halbbildung* in the Tracks of Modernity", which proposes to investigate the contributions of the Critical Theory of Society to contemporary education. This research focuses on the current education crisis and the corresponding retractions of Brazilian public policies, putting at risk its constitutional principles, such as universality, gratuity and secularity. In this text, now presented at VIII CONEDU, we focus on the analysis of the phenomenon of *homeschooling in Brazil*, its legitimation process in the framework of national education, as well as its consequences in the retraction of public educational policies and in the general formation of children. Based on the Critical Theory of Society, the investigation of home education, recently approved by the National Congress, involves the analysis of the hegemony of conservative groups, of reactionary bias, which are currently in control of Brazilian education. Preliminary results of the study point to a conception and political-pedagogical praxis of a besieged education in the bourgeois interior, whose consequences in the medium and long term lead to the narcissistic and solipsistic formation of children and young people. This process further aggravates the framework of semi-formation [semi-culture] instituted by modernity, analyzed by Theodoro Adorno and Walter Benjamin in relation to the decadence of narrative, experience [*Erfahrung*] and communicability, giving way to the trivialities of increasingly solitary experiences [*Erlebnis*], and making a liberating and emancipatory education unfeasible. Thus, *homeschooling is conceived* as a phenomenon derived from the increasingly accentuated process of internalization of bourgeois society, which retracts to the private level one of the most important achievements of the liberal revolutions: the modern universal public school. This phenomenon tends to deepen the crisis of Brazilian education, already asphyxiated by neoliberal reforms that, in recent decades, have caused a retraction in public investments and made its conditions of expansion and qualification even more precarious.

As the aspects that involve the phenomenon are broad, we will limit ourselves to three elements that we consider most harmful of the approval of homeschooling: *Homeschooling* in the context of neoliberalism; *Homeschooling* and the atrophy of contemporary experience; *Homeschooling* and semi-training. These aspects will be analyzed according to the contributions of two main authors of the Frankfurt School: Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, without neglecting to consider other references that help us interpret the phenomenon on screen.



1.1 HOMESCHOOLING IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

Neoliberalism, as a regime of accumulation of financial hegemony (CHESNAIS et al., 2003) became dominant from the end of the 1970s, from the crisis of the Fordist model. Since then, it has controlled public policies as a way to control the State and, consequently, the social offer of education. In the 1980s, the conservative governments of Thatcher, in the United Kingdom, and Regan, in the USA, dictated the policies of restructuring the state on neoliberal bases, due to the great crisis that plagued the European and American *welfare state*, considered "too heavy" and demanding limitations on public investments and exemption from the state machine. Having as a historical landmark the Washington Consensus, in 1989, the meeting of large financial corporations and hegemonic capitalist countries aimed to condition public policies, cooperation agreements and loans to the restructuring of national economies from a broad movement of state exemption, privatizations, fiscal and tax reforms and drastic reduction of operating and personnel costs. The golden rule became: more market and less state. In the Brazilian case, as in all peripheral capitalist countries, it could not pass indifferent to this true avalanche, conditioning educational policies to programmatic neoliberal reforms, something that has only intensified over time, especially in the last decade with the resurgence of conservative thought organized in economics and politics. In this regressive context, the public school has been the main target of the propaganda of disqualification, contingency of resources, inhibition of public investment and encouragement of *charter* school initiatives, vouchers and *homeschool* proposals, leveraged by a progressive wave of minimum state policies, defended by market defenders in partnership with the hegemonic media.

As neoliberalism sees the public school and its investments as a "burden" for the State, several initiatives of bills and even initiative of filing by families for approval and regulation of *homeschooling* have emerged in recent years. Such initiatives, especially American-inspired, have attracted new adherents, usually linked to conservative thought, which found in the Bolsonaro government an important partner in the relaxation of educational legislation, until now restrictive to this type of education.

However, the problem is not new, because the disregard for public education, universal, secular and mandatory, has always been on the agenda of the old liberalism. The *laissez faire*, claimed by Adam Smith in the period when the bourgeoisie found itself in turmoil against the regulations imposed by the mercantilist economy of the European monarchies, is at the origin of liberalism and is reissued by the (neo)liberals against the regulations of the Welfare State, as ardently defended by its greatest modern exponents, such as F. Hayek and M. Friedman. The central Smithian question, however, remains the same: to remove from the State the monopoly of sectors that are of interest to the private initiative through flexibilization and deregulation, leaving the "invisible hand" of the market to act freely. In the case of education, the proposals of the school *vouchers* of the modern authors coincide



with the proposal of financing of education defended in Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, because, for him, the financing of the masters is up to the students, not falling this burden on the State. Even considering the difference of historical time, the proposal is the same, that is, the subtraction of the State in the production/maintenance of public policies and the establishment of free competition, not only commercial, but between individuals, surviving the strongest, in a chaotic save who can. On the adequacy of *homeschooling* to neoliberalism, Brewer and Lubienski (2017, p. 33) point out that:

In this [neoliberal] context, homeschooling may well be the closest embodiment of neoliberalism, as it probably represents the closest form of education that is based on self-regulation, decentralization, and elevation of the individual/private over the collective/public.

In difficult times such as these, the more the State moves away from education, the more it falls into the private domain, always seeking excessive profits, whether they come from the collection of tuition or funds transferred from the public coffers, which puts at risk the founding principles of Brazilian education, rights to harsh penalties won in the Constitution of 1988, such as universal, secular, free education, democratic management, pluralism of pedagogical conceptions, equality of conditions for access and permanence in school and others no less important.

1.2 Or *HOMESCHOOLING AND ATROPHY OF CONTEMPORARY EXPERIENCE*

The ideas of Walter Benjamin (2012) help us to understand that from modernity the human faculty of exchanging experiences through narration goes into decline. The hurried life, the shock of the tumultuous life and the sharpening of the loss of spaces of sociability have made the subjects mute, alien to dialogue and narcissistic confinement.

The way of living in bourgeois society tends to make what Benjamin conceptualized as *Erfahrung* unviable, the true experience. In its place, due to the frequent shocks, life is based on what he called *Erlebnis*, that is, the quick and fleeting experience. About this contradiction, Ventura (2020, p. 10) recalls that:

Erlebnis is the fleeting modern experience, the individual experience, exhausted in itself, cannot be transmissible because it lacks content and even because it has no roots in the past or in a tradition that would claim the condition of transmissibility. While *Erfahrung* dispenses with the communicability of what has been lived and transmitted to others, requiring perenniality and attribution of meaning in time, *Erlebnis* is content with the dryness of the act lived and consumed in the present moment. The German word *Fahren*, which gives rise to *Erfahrung*, means travel; thus, experience is something that accumulates from knowledge that travels, that comes from afar, in time and space. So much so that the classic Benjaminian narrator is the sailor or old peasant, both travelers in his own way or 'as one who comes from afar'.

The Benjaminian analysis is from the 1930s, and although almost a century of his reflections has passed, it seems to talk to us in the present time, because individualism has not only intensified by the internalization of life and family, but also by the subsumption of society to contemporary technique, increasingly focused on private use, including *home-office* work, labor model on the rise, further



atrophying the experience of sociability, while *Erfahrung*. From the art of storytelling, perceiving one's fellow man in the world, to the consideration of the ancestral tradition, which falls into disuse, the capitalist machine originated in modernity grinds the most genuine human practices, which can only assert themselves and make sense if they have the other as a parameter of existence.

If we look closely, one of the few social spaces of encounter with the other and of experimentation of heteronomy, with all its mishaps and problems, is the school. This is still the privileged place to see the other, for constitution and exchange of experiences, for self-telling and exercise of empathy, to put oneself in the place of the other against the winds of liquefaction of affections and relationships (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 14). Going back to the domestic, *homeschooling* is the condemnation of education to the poverty of living [*Erlebnis*] in the bourgeois interior. And in this case, it is not about education as training (*Bildung*), but rather as what Adorno (1995) called *Halbbildung* (*semi-formation*).

2 HOMESCHOOLING AND SEMI-TRAINING

The loss of experience and the muting of the subjects, as studied by Benjmain, a phenomenon that only deepens in contemporaneity, leaves its mark on the process of human formation (*Bildung*). The lack of reference of the other in the formative process tends to the constitution of narcissistic personalities who can only see their private interests. Studying the formation of personality and language, the Russian philosopher and linguist Bakhtin came to the conclusion that without dialogue we cannot constitute ourselves with humans. He said, "... as for me, in everything I hear voices and dialogical relations between them" (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 409); and this is because the search for the voice of others, of polyphony, is what gives us meaning to existence, since "life is dialogical by nature" (BAKHTIN, 2003, p. 348). Therefore, without dialogue, there can be no complete human formation, only what Adorno called semi-formation (*Halbbildung*).

If the narrative, as Benjamin argued, is a condition of humanization to the extent that we communicate our experiences in social relations, domestic education not only atrophies social polyphony, by keeping the child hostage in his own home, but also retracts his ability to become a "social being", in the Aristotelian sense of *zoon politikon*, that is, a being that can only exist in community. On this issue, Ventura (2020, p. 11) points out that:

The full formation of the personality can only take place in contrast to its reverse, the 'other self' with which it identifies itself or not and from which it constitutes itself as individuality (*Selbstbildung*). As well as in the sense of translation, as studied by Antoine Berman (1983), in the essay *Bildung et Bildungsroman*, in which *Bildung* means openness to the stranger (foreigner), one throwing himself out of himself in order to understand the other. It is in this cyclical movement of coming out of oneself and returning that consists of one of the main aspects of formation. This gives much to think about, because, it seems, the loss of modern communicability, so well described by Benjamin and already mentioned earlier, lies mainly in the decline of the faculty of 'translating' (understanding) the other, whether in our own language or in another. This can also be seen in the sense of *Bildung as a journey*, which



Berman identifies in the classics of German Romanticism, whose formative process also has the 'other' as a parameter of self-constitution.

The risk of home education lies not only in the poverty of the experience and the process of semi-formation to which children would be subjected, since pedagogical mediation is fundamental for the process of acquiring significant and non-instrumental knowledge, but also for the production of unhealthy, introspective and solipsistic personalities. Elliot (2018, p. 472) reminds us that "A generation of people is emerging that can be called the 'instant generation' and that treats individualism and purchases on the same level: quickly consumed and with immediate results." This is the new version of what Freud (2020) called the "pleasure principle" that, if not realized, can easily become a "death drive" in repressed egocentric and repressed personalities.

Still on the relationship between semi-training *and homeschooling*, there is still the risk of production of an entire generation that sees itself subjugated to the mechanisms of the market and consumption, because there is no way to perceive counterpoints of otherness, other ways of being and existing that the school provides. In this process, as Adorno (2005, p. 16) states, "Consumers of psychotic prefabricated products feel protected, thus, by all those equally isolated, who, in their isolation in a radical social alienation, end up united by a common insanity."

The process of schooling, as we know, is not an antidote to trauma and frustration. However, the school experience has numerous possibilities of training that precedes adult life, coming to the unusual, conflicts and challenges of living in society. At home, only the event can occur the everyday, the immediate, the repetition of isolated, narcissistic experiences, when the desires come ready as a canned, a finished product, but not conquered, although satisfied in the domestic universe. The problem is that one hour this guy will come out of the dome of the domestic interior and his reactions to community life will be unpredictable.

3 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

We live in a time when the demands for a lifestyle aimed at privacy are deepening and Benjamin called it "bourgeois intérieur", when the domicile becomes the last ivory tower of the individual and individualism.

During the almost a century and a half of the Republic, the school has presented itself as an important counterpoint to the purely family designs, even conflicting with them many times, whether from the point of view of religiosity, habits or even ideologies. This counterpoint is very important for the child to appropriate non-domesticated scientific knowledge, other ways of life and other ideas, in addition to having to share with others, "outsiders", part of his own life, decentralizing his positions, controlling his desires and impetus for the collective "good". *Homeschooling* is the reverse of this and means the alienation of the child from the pluralism present in society, because the interior represents



the monologue, the non-contradiction, isolating it from real life. In this case, the chances of the child getting used to conspiracy theories, *fake news*, flat earthism and other aberrations, is great, because it will only so read what is repeated at home without another parameter. What's more, it tends to get used to the idea that what counts are personal opinions, "post-truths" and sectarian doctrines. Not that the school can guarantee that this does not happen, but it is fundamental to have the contradictory to "test" our beliefs, knowledge and values.

Thus, the approval of *homeschooling in the* National Congress [heading to the Senate] represents another fissure in the Brazilian school and another advance against the public financing of education, its universality and gratuity. In addition, it also represents an affront to the poorest and most vulnerable population, which could never afford such an expensive model. As if the various social apartheid were not enough, *we will now have the educational, separating those who will have access to an elitist modality of education, in the form of preceptorship of teachers delivery, from those who remain dependent on a historically scrapped system that, despite everything, insists on resisting.*

The implications, however, are many of the approval of homeschooling, here we point out only the tip of the *iceberg*.



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