

WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO TODAY IN BRAZIL, IN THE CONTEXT OF EXTERNAL ASSESSMENTS?

O QUE PODE A ESCOLA HOJE, NO BRASIL, NO CONTEXTO DAS AVALIAÇÕES EXTERNAS?

¿QUÉ PUEDEN HACER HOY LAS ESCUELAS EN BRASIL, EN EL CONTEXTO DE LAS EVALUACIONES EXTERNAS?



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ABSTRACT

The question that titles this article is quite pertinent: What can schools in Brazil do today, within the context of external evaluations? Without aiming to exhaust the multiple possibilities for interpretation that this question offers and invites, this article seeks to discuss external evaluation and its relationship to everyday school processes, highlighting the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) calculated from data on school flow obtained through the School Census and average performance in the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb). Through a systematic literature review, it is possible to understand the (im)possibilities of Brazilian schools within an oppressive, segregating, meritocratic context that places blame/accountability primarily on teachers and students. Under this neoliberal aegis, Brazilian public education is regulated by the State, being subordinated to market logic, leading us to reflect, from a critical-questioning perspective, on what the school can do amidst this scenario of annihilation of its potential and charms.

Keywords: External Evaluation. School. IDEB (Basic Education Development Index). Accountability.

RESUMO

É propícia a pergunta que dá o título a este artigo: O que pode a escola hoje, no Brasil, no contexto das avaliações externas? Para tanto, sem o objetivo de esgotar as múltiplas possibilidades de escrita que a pergunta nos possibilita e convida, o presente artigo busca discutir a avaliação externa e suas relações com os processos escolares cotidianos, destacando o Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (Ideb) calculado a partir dos dados sobre o fluxo escolar obtidos por meio do Censo Escolar e das médias de desempenho no Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica (Saeb). No exercício de uma revisão sistemática da literatura, é possível compreender as (im)possibilidades das escolas brasileiras em um contexto opressor, segregador, meritocrático e de culpabilização/responsabilização (*accountability*), principalmente do professor e do aluno.

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Nesta égide neoliberal, a educação pública brasileira é regulada pelo Estado, sendo subordinada à lógica do mercado, fazendo-nos refletir, a partir de um pensamento crítico-contestador, o que pode a escola em meio a este cenário de aniquilamento de suas potencialidades e encantamentos.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação Externa. Escola. IDEB (Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica). Accountability.

RESUMEN

La pregunta que da título a este artículo es muy pertinente: ¿Qué pueden hacer hoy las escuelas en Brasil, en el contexto de las evaluaciones externas? Sin pretender agotar las múltiples interpretaciones que esta pregunta ofrece e invita, este artículo busca analizar la evaluación externa y su relación con los procesos escolares cotidianos, destacando el Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica (IDEB), calculado a partir de datos sobre el flujo escolar obtenidos mediante el Censo Escolar y el desempeño promedio en el Sistema de Evaluación de la Educación Básica (SAEB). A través de una revisión sistemática de la literatura, es posible comprender las (im)posibilidades de las escuelas brasileñas dentro de un contexto meritocrático, opresivo y segregacionista que responsabiliza principalmente a docentes y estudiantes. Bajo este marco neoliberal, la educación pública brasileña está regulada por el Estado, subordinada a la lógica del mercado, lo que nos lleva a reflexionar, desde una perspectiva crítico-cuestionadora, sobre qué puede hacer la escuela en medio de este escenario de aniquilación de su potencial y atractivo.

Palabras clave: Evaluación Externa. Escuela. IDEB (Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica). Rendición de Cuentas.

1 INTRODUCTION

All knowledge [...] must contain a minimum of nonsense, like the old patterns of carpet or ornamental friezes, where one can always discover, at some point, an insignificant deviation from its normal course. In other words: the decisive thing is not the pursuit of knowledge in knowledge, but the leap that takes place in each one of them.

Walter Benjamin

Discussing what the School can do today, in Brazil, in the context of external evaluations, implies rethinking the figure, the role and the understanding of what is the knowledge historically constructed and transmitted within Brazilian schools. In the fragment that opens this introduction, written by the critic of modernity, the philosopher Walter Benjamin, knowledge has its perfection and standardization questioned, enabling the reader to believe in other truths, in the successes arising from deviations, from what seems to be insignificant, but which demonstrates an important ability to show us what the school can do today in a context of ready-made truths and not constructed of a single right answer, as if everything inside and outside it were homogeneous, despising the diversity that makes this privileged environment a space of potentialities and enchantments.

Thus, thinking about singularity and not standardization, it is possible to conceive the school as a space of creation, where the unprecedented shows us a living place, in which evaluation needs to be thought and problematized in a context of annihilation, in which the ranking, the comparison between different cities and states, the identification of better and worse, it has become something common in a country that makes its Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) through large-scale external evaluations, a one-way street that does not fit Brazil in its diversity, in which few walk/cross and that ends up creating the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb) that contributes nothing to the construction of public policies for Education, so that the barriers of inequality that prevent the access and permanence of thousands of students are overcome, creating mechanisms for the democratization of teaching, inclusion and, above all, that builds an evaluation capable of thinking with/in the school, not crucifying it and taxing it as a producer of insufficient teaching and learning.

Current public education policies conceive external evaluations as the main instrument of control by the State, using an outdated discourse that it is through them that teaching and learning practices can be improved. How? It will not be through copies, boring training exercises, based on a certain pattern of question and answer, fragmented and far from the reality of the students that we will have an expansion of the School's potential, on the contrary, we will be further reducing it and reinforcing an incompetent public school discourse. Here,

the one who fails in reality is the State, reinforcing a historical inequality and failing to promote the long-awaited quality education.

From agreements based on the agendas of international agencies, such as the World Bank, in a more categorical way from the 90's onwards, Brazil has been incorporating the model of *accountability*, of managerial logic, fostering Decrees such as, for example, No. 6,094/2007, which creates the Plan of Goals Commitment All for Education that defines the Ideb, configuring an evaluating and controlling State, through external evaluations that it is up to us to contest/inquire: What can the School do today, in Brazil, in the context of external evaluations?

2 THE BASIC EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT INDEX (Ideb): A RANKING AT THE SERVICE OF WHOM?

Based on the studies of Azevedo (2001), it is possible to identify since the 30s the possibility of a systematic evaluation of Brazilian education. However, according to the author, and through other studies – such as that of Coelho (2008), it was only at the end of the 1980s that an evaluation system on a national scale began to be developed, and its first application dates back to 1990. Therefore, from that year to the present date of writing this article, the Basic Education Evaluation System (SAEB) evaluates all Basic Education in the country, with Early Childhood Education being included as of 2019.

On December 20, 1996, Law No. 9394/96 was approved, which regulates the Guidelines and Bases of National Education (BRASIL, 1996). The text of the Law had as rapporteur Senator Darcy Ribeiro, who used the SAEB as the main unified mechanism for evaluating Brazilian education, serving as a kind of compass for the formulation of educational policies in the country. In line with the Law, in 1997 the reference matrices and, later, the descriptors, in which students from all over Brazil had to present minimum competencies to certain contents, were incorporated into the SAEB.

In the context described above, taken from a neoliberal perspective, it is important to consider that we have a wave of transnational regulation (BARROSO, 2006) based on a discourse created by international organizations, such as the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). which ends up importing ideas/policies from different countries considered non-peripheral.

In this vein, in 2005, we created the National Assessment of School Performance (Anresc) – the Prova Brasil – with the objective of assessing the knowledge of students from all over Brazil in the subjects of Portuguese language and mathematics. To this end, the

SAEB was expanded and further reinforced at the national level, so much so that in 2007 Decree No. 6,094 was instituted, which deals with the implementation of the Plan of Goals Commitment All for Education, aiming at the social mobilization of families, school communities, the Union, the States, Municipalities and the Federal District for the improvement of the quality of basic education (BRASIL, 2007).

In its article 3, Decree No. 6,094 regulates the Ideb, namely:

Art. 3 The quality of basic education will be objectively measured based on the IDEB, calculated and periodically disclosed by INEP, based on data on school performance, combined with student performance, contained in the school census and the Basic Education Evaluation System - SAEB, composed of the National Evaluation of Basic Education - ANEB and the National Evaluation of School Performance (Prova Brasil). Sole Paragraph. The IDEB will be the objective indicator for verifying the fulfillment of the goals set in the term of adhesion to the Commitment (BRASIL, 2007).

It can be inferred, from the text of the Decree, that the word "quality" is right at the beginning of the article that deals with the Ideb, encouraging the maintenance of the same discourse in Law 13.005/2014, which institutes the National Education Plan (PNE) in its twenty goals, with goal 7 being the reason for analysis of this article: "To foster the quality of basic education in all stages and modalities, with improvement of the school flow and learning in order to achieve the following national averages for the Ideb" (BRASIL, 2014).

In this neoliberal logic, what ended up being configured in Brazil was a culture of ranking throughout Brazil, further reinforcing the country's historical inequality, causing a policy of competition capable of placing schools from the same education system as adversaries, accentuating a fragile discourse about a better school and a worse school, as if they all had the same students and were located at the same address, disregarding essential sociocultural factors to understand the conditions of each institution and which public education policies are necessary for a more equitable, inclusive and democratic education. Regarding ranking, Araújo (2007, p.4) points out that:

[...] the IDEB is more of a regulatory instrument than a definer of criteria for a better application of the Union's resources in order to change educational indicators. The result of each municipality and each state will be (and is already being) used to rank the education networks, to intensify competition and to pressure, via public opinion, the achievement of better results. In other words, the function of the MEC assumed by the Lula government maintains the perverse logic in force during twelve years of FHC.

This is a managerialist idea, with the objective that Schools present results as in a company, exempting the State from responsibilities and blaming, in particular, teachers and students for the results obtained. Therefore, this idea of quality of administration has in large-

scale evaluation the necessary subsidy to exempt the State from its role, disregarding the School and its characteristics in the context in which it is inserted and the specificities of its students.

The IDEB ends up being configured as an indicator at the service of the market guided by international organizations that aim to maintain the power of some over the exploitation of labor and the reproduction of the living conditions of others – the working class, understood as subaltern and necessary to the care of emerging neoliberal policies.

Regarding the Ideb and its configuration in the Brazilian public education scenario, Parente (2012, p.74) highlights:

What is imposed today in Brazilian public schools is the need to present results of efficiency and effectiveness at all costs (Taylorist model), rewarding the schools that present the best results, generating a climate of competitiveness among them. [...] In the same way that privatization strained relations in the school environment and between the spheres of public power, managerialism imposes a culture of competitiveness, represented by a power relationship and by statistical indicators that propose to measure the quality of education through evaluation processes [IDEB, Prova Brasil, ENEM].

In an attempt to answer the question that opens this section – Basic Education Development Index (Ideb): A ranking at the service of whom? – it is possible to consider that this managerialist model, in which the school must be accountable for its work, is in fact not at the service of an education that aims at the democratization of teaching and the construction of social justice.

Disregarding other forms of evaluation that take into account the teaching and learning process, as well as the development of each student, in an individualized way, this ranking model reinforces stigmas of school failure based on a shallow discourse devoid of knowledge about school spaces, summarizing evaluation in a duality between those who get it right (know?) and those who make mistakes (don't know?). Here, the question marks purposely composed the "know" and the "don't know", in order to problematize the extent to which an objective test is able to provide information that expresses whether the students have learned or not. Considering the complexity that involves the daily life of the School and everything that is predictable and unpredictable, from the class that spends months without a teacher to the student prevented from going to school due to the police operation in his or her community and/or the lack of infrastructure in the school environment is, at least and categorically, It is impossible for us to evaluate all students on the same parameter, the same line, which does not account for deviations that are not insignificant, but which affirm the school as a living place, of possibilities and enchantments.

The results of the Ideb, in the logic of ranking, are an end in themselves, not allowing other possible paths of policies committed, in fact, to the different students who form the identities of thousands of schools and who are not considered in the large-scale evaluation proposed in the country. Thus,

[...] Making the result the starting point for a process of accountability of the school via city halls leads us to explain the difference based on the liberal meritocratic perspective: merit of the principal who is well organized; merit of children who are hardworking; merit of the teachers who are applied; merit of the mayor who should be reelected, etc. But what about the living conditions of students and teachers? What about inadequate government policies? And what is left of a public service that the elites, in order to get elected, made a hanger for generalized employment, as long as they could without rules for hiring or firing? What about the permanent removal of teachers and specialists at any time, jumping from school to school? What about the hourly teachers who are divided between several schools? What can be said about the students who inhabit the growing favelas without minimum conditions for survival and much less to create an environment conducive to study? Not to mention the number of students in the classroom. (FREITAS, 2007, p. 971-972)

With Freitas (2007), it is possible to further intend what the results presented by Ideb can represent beyond the ranking and accountability of the school, denouncing the meritocratic perspective that feeds inequality and presents a lethargic State in the promotion of public policies committed to schools and their potential. The IDEB ends up being subsidized, in general terms, by a logic based on productivity, effectiveness and *accountability*, at the service of a managerialist practice that exclusively favors the market, represented by the oppressors.

3 WHAT CAN THE SCHOOL DO?

In the context of external evaluations, what can the school today, in Brazil, do between mistakes and successes?

Among more mistakes than successes, of course! In a direct answer to the question that opens this subsection, it is possible to identify an education policy that already begins by disregarding Brazil itself and all its diversity, because the idea brought, which began in the 1990s and was strengthened in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in force until the present day, despises, or rather, presents a total lack of knowledge of the problem that is chronic – social inequality – which does not allow even in the long term to be realized a standardized evaluation at the national level and, above all, to work on the data obtained as they have always been worked wrongly.

The saturated order of the Ideb, calculated by means of two variables, the school flow and the performance in the Prova Brasil, on a vertical scale from zero to ten, does not account

for the educational needs of the country and does not allow us to know our own education. There are errors that are not in schools, but in those that formulate and direct the country's educational policies. Evaluating is always necessary – it is important to emphasize this, but the way in which it is evaluated must be widely discussed. On the other hand, we experience the practice that, in the words of Afonso (2001), is of an "Evaluator State", based on the aegis of comparison, ranking, competition. In the errors presented here, we have the evaluations:

external, carried out by entities external to the institution, and are exogenous, decided outside the institution (as opposed to internal and endogenous evaluations); they are summative, not formative; they are focused on results, and not on pedagogical processes or on the social effectiveness of educational policies; are mostly carried out ex-post and aimed at stimulating the competitiveness of higher education institutions that make up the educational quasi-market (OLIVEIRA; YANNOULAS, 2013, p. 76).

The citation promotes the exposure of a series of errors promoted by the SAEB, as this same system disregards the process that involves teaching and learning, focusing its attention exclusively on the result. Thus, evaluating the quality of education through Ideb does not give us the diagnosis we need to think about public policies to improve Brazilian public education. The Ideb as an end only serves to create an unfair ranking devoid of truths, far from reality, based on merely quantitative, cold data.

In the errors made by an incomprehensible evaluation system, summarizing education and promoting the status of comparison, ranking, *accountability*, between error and success is, at the very least, contradictory. There is a contempt for the stories that make up the school and that makes it a place of possibilities. Undoubtedly, there is a story that history does not tell, since it is not important to neoliberal interests that exempt the State from its role/accountability.

Established by Ordinance number 931, on March 21, 2005, the SAEB, as already mentioned, was initially formed by two basic reference matrices, namely: the National Assessment of Basic Education (ANEB) and the National Assessment of School Performance (ANRESC). Both are based on a quality discourse that lacks a deeper understanding of the data collected by the School Census. In 2013, Brazil began to have the National Literacy Assessment (ANA), aimed at students in the 3rd year of Elementary School I segment, evaluating them in Portuguese language and mathematics, the last of which was in 2016. However, what interests us to problematize, in a more forceful way, is the "fruit generated by the SAEB" (SOUZA; ASUNÇÃO, 2011), which is the Ideb – an indicator that has been establishing labels for all Brazilian public schools, producing external pressures to annihilate the potentialities and enchantments that are inherent to the condition of school

institutions. The State ends up exercising its coercive power and the external evaluations with their results end up having no positive impact on the pedagogical organization of the schools. In this regard, Blasis, Falsarella and Alavarse (2013, p. 39) point out that,

It is important to recognize that external evaluation does not end with the disclosure of test results and indicators. It continues as it involves society, schools, communities and public authorities in the debates about these results and, from there, paving the way both to densify and dialogue with the internal evaluations carried out within the scope of the schools (of the pedagogical project and the educational action), and within the scope of the departments of education (of the guidelines of the educational policy).

However, what is observed in Brazil is exactly the opposite of what the authors above bring. In the current context, the school, in a relationship of subordination with the current evaluation policies of the State, ends up being reduced in its potentiality, except for the exceptions, in few places in Brazil, of those who refuse to take the Prova Brasil. Thus, Vianna (2005, p. 6) points out:

Evaluation is not a value in itself and should not be restricted to a simple rite of educational bureaucracy; needs to be integrated into the process of transformation of teaching/learning and thus actively contribute to the process of transformation of students.

This transformation of students is linked to the transformation of teaching, of the school, which goes against the productivism imposed by the hegemonic model of evaluation. Grades serve to include and exclude people, as Garcia (2001) pointed out, so many of us have already witnessed – as students or teachers – students who were left behind because of tenths in the grade, after all "[...] deep down it is she who decides her life" (VASCONCELLOS, 2008, p. 18). Ideb reinforces this tradition and encourages this culture even more. Luckesi (2001) calls this the pedagogy of the exam, characterized by the lack of commitment to the teaching process and, especially, to the students' learning. In this regard, Esteban (2001) brings an important analysis of what ended up becoming school evaluation itself. According to the author:

School evaluation, which maintains the logic of the exam, can be understood as one of the gentlest, less bodily violent and visually less perceptible methods of maintaining discipline; one of the instruments capable of acting with intensity and amplitude on the subject in its entirety. It has the sense of disciplining not only the body, but also the thought, the will, the dispositions (ESTEBAN, 2001, p. 105).

The school's potentiality is prevented from being experienced, because the pedagogical relationship it establishes with its students is purely disciplinary, both in body and in thought. At school, this model ends up being more camouflaged, perhaps less visible because it does not gain media like large-scale evaluation. The relationship established is one of reward or punishment, of reinforcement illustrated in the table of outstanding students of the two months or in the medal placed by the teacher on the chest of the "best student" in the class. Luckesi (2014, p. 17) draws our attention by making a kind of warning when he says that this model of evaluation internally practiced in our schools does not contribute to the change of paradigms imposed by large-scale evaluations, on the contrary, it only reinforces, works in favor of it. According to the author, these forms of evaluations [...] do not help us to realize the dream, the hope and the desire for democratization of education. On the contrary, they camouflage reality so that we can see their limited processes and results." As in a company, we end up valuing only the final product, that is, the grade (the number) that the student gives us.

In view of all this, it is worth returning to the question that gives the title to this subsection: What can the School do?

This model of external evaluation as a public policy, functioning as a mechanism for regulating educational policies and, especially, daily pedagogical practices, has made us doubt what the school can do, mainly because it traditionally ends up incorporating the oppressive, segregating, meritocratic and accountability model) imposed at the national level through external evaluations, which ends up harming it on a primary basis.

What is up to the school, then?

To understand, first of all, that "no content is learned by the person without being modeled by the affections, by the meaning that the learning of the content in question has for the subject who learns" (PRANDINI, 2004, p. 44). Thus, it is not through memorization and repetition that we will show what the school can do. The excerpt from the song *Estudo Errado*, by Gabriel – o Pensador, makes a scathing criticism of this model of grading system: "Mom, I got a ten on the test! I did well, I got a hundred and I want to see who fails me / I memorized every lesson / I didn't make a mistake [...] Almost everything I learned, tomorrow I already forgot / I memorized, copied, memorized, but I didn't understand". In addition to evaluation, criticism is also related to the education system, in line with what Luckesi (2005, p. 19) says: "the practice of the exam, due to operating with the pass/fail resources, necessarily leads to the policy of failure, which has manifested itself as the most consistent alibi for school failure".

It is up to the school, then, in the context of the evaluation promoted by it and its teachers, to change paradigms and philosophical conceptions that it reinforces and practices

in its daily life. Esteban (2001) addresses the issue of evaluation as an investigative practice, as opposed to the exclusionary model of external and internal evaluations. In this sense, in defense of a formative evaluation, Hoffmann (1993) highlights that "evaluation is a permanent reflection on reality, and accompaniment, step by step, of the student, in his trajectory of knowledge construction". Thus, without the objective of promoting a pre-established response or even moving towards a conclusion that delimits right or wrong, it is possible to think of alternatives for the democratization of education, providing processes for a more inclusive evaluation, as Esteban (2001) and Hoffmann (1993) point out. In this context of what the school can do, it is necessary and coherent to develop an evaluation of learning as a loving act as "the one who welcomes the situation, in its truth (as it is)" (LUCKESI, 2005).

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is inaccurate to say what the school can do today, in Brazil, in the context of external evaluations. The question that gives the title to this article implies a change in thinking in all those involved with education and who believe in the power and enchantment that it is capable of producing. The *accountability model*, imposed through external evaluations, reduces the role of the school into a mere executor of technical activities based on productivity criteria, producing an indicator that is far from being something reliable in the Brazilian educational reality, such as the Ideb. In order for the school itself to deconstruct the fallacy of the discourse that external evaluations serve to measure the quality of education, it is necessary that evaluation policies be replaced by the recognition of the existence of differences in daily school life.

Thus, rankings are of no use, except to propagate a vision of homogenization based on positivist ideals that consolidate public education policies that end up accentuating social inequality in Brazil, as well as producing school failure through student failure/exclusion. Therefore, contemplating the complexity that involves the training space that is the school may not be the point of arrival, but certainly the starting point, promoting a necessary reflection based on dialogue and the democratization of evaluation processes inside and outside the institution.

In conclusion, but without the objective of accounting for the discussion started here and establishing ready-made answers, it is important to realize that the idea of the questions that permeate the writing of this article works as a kind of tapestry, in which other threads form so many other carpets with deviations of colors and shapes. In this intent, many other questions arise that are part of this article, and it is part of its own methodological selection to choose one that would continue the movement initiated here: What other paths could we

follow against what external evaluation imposes on us? I understand that, "for this, neither threat nor punishment is necessary, but rather welcoming and loving confrontation" (LUCKESI, 2001, p. 33).

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