

Managerialism and performativity: is it the only way to quality public school?

Gerencialismo e performatividade: o único caminho para a escola pública de qualidade?

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Abstract

This article presents a research on editorials of the two main printed newspapers with the largest circulation and reach in Brazil: “Folha de São Paulo” and “O Estado de São Paulo”. The editorials were published between 2007 and 2016, and their analysis refer to the relationship between Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) and school management. The concepts of performativity and managerialism developed by Stephen Ball were used to analyze the educational reforms that took place in Europe in the last decades, which have resulted in the introduction of market values and the definition of quality, which is achieved through competition, efficiency, performance and professional accountability. As a consequence of these reforms, we have disqualified public service management, especially in education. Using the analysis of the discourses as a methodology, 30 editorials were studied, and we found that, like in Europe, Brazilian public education is of poor quality, since the students performance in national and international external evaluations is very low. Thus, it is considered that the way to improve the quality of public education would be to reform school management in an efficient and competitive manner. Consequently, the editorials analyzed stated that quality education is what qualifies students for the job market and not for a social transformation, in a perspective of social quality education, valuing the integral formation of the human being.

Keywords: Managerialism. Performativity. IDEB. Mass media.

Resumo

Este texto apresenta uma pesquisa sobre editoriais de dois dos principais jornais impressos e de maior circulação e alcance no Brasil: “Folha de São Paulo” e “O Estado de São Paulo”. São analisados os editoriais que se referem à relação entre o Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica (IDEB) e a gestão escolar, publicados entre os anos de 2007 e 2016. A partir dos conceitos: performatividade e gerencialismo, desenvolvidos por Stephen Ball, utilizados para analisar as reformas educacionais ocorridas nas últimas décadas na Europa, e que resultaram na introdução dos valores do mundo do mercado, na definição da qualidade, sendo essa obtida através da competição, da eficiência, do desempenho e da responsabilização dos profissionais. Como consequência destas reformas, temos a desqualificação da gestão do serviço público, em especial, da educação. Utilizando-se da análise do discurso como metodologia, foram estudados 30 editoriais, e, verificamos que assim como na Europa, a educação pública brasileira é de má qualidade, pois o desempenho dos alunos nas avaliações externas nacionais e internacionais é muito baixo. Assim, considera-se que o caminho para

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a melhoria da qualidade da educação pública, seria reformar a gestão escolar de maneira eficiente e competitiva. Dessa forma, os editoriais analisados deixam claro que uma educação de qualidade é aquela que qualifica os estudantes para o mercado de trabalho e não para uma transformação social, na perspectiva de uma qualidade social da educação, valorizando a formação integral do ser humano.

Palavras-chave: Gerencialismo. Performatividade. IDEB. Meios de comunicação.

Introduction

Large scale external evaluation has been growing in the Brazilian educational scenery since the 90s on the XX century. Since the 30s, the federal government adopted a policy to build a data collection system about Brazilian's educational system that was established mainly since the creation of Evaluation System of the Basic Education (SAEB) in 1994 (FREITAS, 2007; BONAMINO; FRANCO, 2013). In this process the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research "Anísio Teixeira" (INEP) became the central organ for elaboration, distribution, systematization and propagation of the large scale external evaluations elaborated by Brazilian federal government.

With this centralization by the federal government, the large scale external evaluations in Brazil made great progress in the theoretical and methodological field on the 90s (KLEIN, 2055; VIANNA, 2009). This advances allowed the creation of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB) in 2007. The IDEB is made of two data: school efficiency and student performance at Brazil Test (Prova Brasil), a large-scale assessment organized by INEP every two years to assess public school students in the final grades of middle school I (1st to 5th grade) and middle school II (6th to 9th grade). The results of this indicator are shown in a 1 to 10 scale, and the target is that Brazilian schools reach 6 points until 2021.

This way, this indicator started to quantify the education quality as the legislation affirms on the Article 3rd of Decree 6.904/07,

The quality of basic education will be measured objectively based on IDEB, calculated and published periodically by INEP, using data on school performance combined with student performance and embodied in the school census and the Basic Education Evaluation System (Sistema de Avaliação da Educação Básica – SAEB), composed by National Basic Education Evaluation (Avaliação Nacional da Educação Básica – ANEB) and the National Student Performance Evaluation (Prova Brasil). Single Paragraph. **IDEB will be the objective indicator** to verify the fulfillment of the goals fixated in the agreement term to the Commitment. (BRASIL, 2007, bold of the author).

In other words, if we think quality concepts as being polysemy and historical (OLIVEIRA; ARAÚJO, 2005), after the institution of IDEB, this polysemy of quality ceases to exist and it is defined in a clear and objective concept.

This objectivity and simplification of what is quality started to be used by different social settings, including communication vehicles (IAIES, 2003) that started to spread rankings, value competition among schools and establish meritocracy between teachers and school managers, affirming that this is the way to assure "quality education".

In the face of this scenery, this article analyses editorials of two mass circulation newspapers: “Folha de São Paulo” e “O Estado de São Paulo”, from 2007 to 2016, that have used IDEB results to make their own considerations of Brazilian educational public policies. In this analysis process, we used the concepts of performativity and managerialism, elaborated by Stephen Ball (2001, 2004, 2005, 2012). Finally, through discourse analysis, we try to understand how the editorials from these communication outlets are disseminating ideas of improvement on the quality of Brazilian education.

The performativity and new managerialism

We see as a way to study educational policies is to understand it as a process, as advocated by Stephen Ball and his contributors (BOWE; BALL;GOLD, 1992). This way, the policy is not static and stablished almost always without a plan, an implementation and results, on the contrary

(...) policies move, consensus and conflicts happen, and are denominated by the author (Stephen Ball) as contexts: the influence context, the content production context and the practical context. This interrelated context set is not treated as political steps and do not have a temporal or sequential dimension, but can be found inside the others, the policy is found as a process and consequence (REZENDE; BAPTISTA, 2011, P.175).

Using this concept of policy as a process, Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) introduce an analytical approach on public policies, called Policy Cycle Approach. In this theoretical approach, there are different interrelated production contexts on a policy formulation. They are: influence context “where normally public policies are initiated and political speeches are built” (MAINARDES, 2006, p. 51). In this influence context, there is a conflict process between the actors involved, inflows from different speeches by academic institutions, class entities and international agencies. As examples of the latest, we highlight: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank which base their quality concept in external evaluations like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment).

Next, in the production context, there is the policy materialization through legal documents, political texts, comments, etc. This context is connected to the previous context and both are made almost at the same time, since the different disputes on the influence field will produce a consistent speech on the public policy area. It is in this context that IDEB works, as a defining mechanism of quality education. The government, through different strategies, like communication outlets, have been building, for the past decade, a vision that quality education can be measured by these exams (FREITAS, 2007).

It follows the practical context “where policies are under interpretation and recreation, and where policies conduct effects and consequences” (MAINARDES, 2006, p.53). This way, it is not accurate to understand that because there is a text as an example of an educational indicator that it will produce the results expected by its idealizers, in other words, in a practical context, actors reinterpret the meanings of the materialized speeches in a text. Further on, Ball adds other two contexts for practical context analysis: results or effect context and political strategy context (BALL, 1994). In the former it is discussed “justice, equality and individual liberty questions”

(MAINARDES, 2007, 31), and the second context “involves the identification of a group of political and social activities that would be needed to deal with inequalities created or reproduced by invested policy” (Idem, p.32)

Faced with these different contexts, Ball defines the current public policies as a product of

(...) a process of “bricolagem”; a matter of borrowing and copying bits and pieces of ideas from elsewhere, drawing upon and amending locally tried-and-tested approaches, cannibalising theories, research, trends and fashions, and not infrequently a flailing around for anything at all that looks as though it might work. Most policies are ramshackle, compromise, hit and miss affairs, that are reworked, tinkered with, nuanced and inflected through complex processes of influence, text production, dissemination and ultimately recreation in contexts of practice (BALL, 2001, p.102).

We understand that in educational politics field and, especially, in the external evaluation field, Brazil has been suffering with this “bricolage” of pedagogical practices and patterns, mainly since the beginning of 1990, the moment that intensifies the implementation process of the first external evaluation cycle in the country, established from World Bank demands, the Brazilian education (BONAMINO; FRANCO, 2013).

Starting from policies as a process conception, composed by the intermingling of different contexts, Ball analyzes the British educational context, and builds the performativity concept that

It is a technology, a culture and a setting mode that uses evaluations, comparisons and demonstrations as a way of control, wear and change. The individual or organizational performances serve as productivity or result measures, demonstrating “quality” (BALL, 2012, p.37).

Further on Ball defines how the performativities are build:

It is reached through construction and publication of information, indicators and other institutional performances, and promotional materials as mechanisms to animate, assess and compare professionals in terms of results, the unit (of measure) to name, differentiate and classify – ie, through “excellence patterns” (BALL, 2012, p.37).

This way we can understand that in the context of Brazilian educational system, this performativity process also happens and one example is the biannual IDEB result publications by INEP, that are taken by communication vehicles. These communication outlets spread which are the best and worst schools, how some education networks were able to achieve their results, which public policies are adopted by school managers to achieve these results, etc. Accordingly, we have in the practical context of Brazilian education system the legitimization of IDEB and external evaluation policy – or “avaliatocracy”, as defined by Afonso (2014) - as a defining mechanism of quality education. In addition, this performativity process interferes in a homogenizing way, so that all national education networks adopt the same actions as the ones that achieved an excellent standard (homogenizing speech).

In this attempt of a homogenizing speech, this concept of quality, excellence, that accordingly to Ball (2005, p. 544) “are products of a political reform and public sector cultural reengineering” called new managerialism that

(...) represents the insertion, in the public sector, of a new form of power, it is an instrument to create a competitive business culture, a force of transformation. Managerialism plays the important role of destroying the ethical-professional systems that prevail in schools, causing them to be replaced by competitive business systems [...] The manager’s job involves instilling an attitude in a culture which workers feel responsible and, at the same time, personally invested with responsibility for the well-being of the organization [...] These new invisible management pedagogies, performed through performance-related evaluations, analyzes, and forms of payment, “expand” what can be controlled at an administrative level (BALL, 2005, p. 544-545)

From this two practices or technologies (performativity and managerialism) defined by Ball, not only the educational system would be affected but all public sector, that started to be identified as unproductive, ineffective, bureaucratic and without quality. In turn, the new managerialism speech to the public sector represents the “excellence, effectivity and quality” (BALL, 2006, p. 12).

On the educational field, this two technologies: managerialism and performativity represent the following changes in school practice: the learning is seen as a result and not a process, the teachers are transformed in pedagogic technicians whose objective is to improve students performance in different external evaluations that are submitted; the competition, the classification and the schools and students performance are increasingly encouraged. This way, the values and ethic are modified, the beliefs in a good education, in a good teacher, the autonomy of interrelations between teacher and student are replaced by competition, performance and results, and only these matters.

We understand that these concepts developed by Ball at the end of 1990, when analyzing the British and European scenarios, are also present in the Brazilian educational system. As the own author defined, the current public policies are a product of the “bricolage” of different patterns adopted in a globalized world. Thereby, Brazil also fits this new performativity and managerialism society, and as we will see ahead, communication vehicles are the broadcasters of the public sector “modernization” ideas, especially in the educational system.

The methodological course: the discourse analysis

Based on the theoretical construction of the policy cycle approach and Ball’s performativity and managerialism concepts (2001, 2004, 2012) we started to analyze the influence context related to the IDEB results published by written press, through editorials of two newspapers with the largest mass circulation and reach in Brazil: “Folha e São Paulo” e “O Estado de São Paulo”, from January 2007 to May 2016.

For this purpose, we understand that document analysis is not only data collection and tabulation of these documents:

Documentary research, as a method of social reality investigation does not have a single philosophical conception of research, can be used both in positivist and in more critical approaches. This characteristic takes shape according to the theoretical framework that nourishes the researcher's thinking, since not only the documents chosen but their analysis must answer the questions of the research, requiring the researcher a reflexive and creative capacity not only in the way he understands the problem, but in the relations that it can establish between this and its context, in the way in which it elaborates its conclusions and how it communicates them (SILVA et al., 2009, p. 4556).

In the initial search for the online² collection of these two newspapers, we used IDEB as a keyword. This way, we found 405 citations in "Folha de São Paulo" and 510 in "O Estado de São Paulo"³. As a methodological clipping of this text, we restrained the analysis to only two editorials from each newspaper. The choice was based on the "fact of it having an institutional autonomy assumed internally by the own organization and by the communication vehicle where it is published" (ALVES FILHO, 2009, p.83). In other words, the editorial is a journalistic genre from which institutions of communication outlets use to express their opinion face a situation or fact.

Therefore, in the searched period, it was found 14 editorials in Folha de São Paulo e 16 in O Estado de São Paulo mentioning IDEB results. For the reading of these editorials we used discourse analysis that "aims at understand how a symbolic object produces meanings, as it is invested of significance by and for others" (ORLANDI, 2015, p.24).

Through the reading of this editorials, we tried to understand the text not as a finished and concluded object, but on contrary, to be analyzed in the discourse perspective "it returns its incompleteness, waved to a game of multiple interpretive possibilities, to the context it has generated, to the ideology impregnated there and to the relations of the actors that make it possible" (MINAYO, 2014, p.321).

Consequently the text as "discourse is circunstancial" (GILL, 2008, p.249), results in a production context (ALL, 1994; BOWE; BALL; GOLD, 1992) characterized in a historical context, resulting of many ideological disputes between the actor. That way,

(...) the deconstruction of texts in order to understand their production process becomes an important mechanism of discursive analysis, as far as it allows to locate the inconsistencies of the texts, the points in which it transgresses the limits within which it was constructed (SHIROMA et al., 2005, p.483).

Finally, the discourse analysis as a methodological instrument allows this text deconstruction by understanding that speech is the place where one can observe this relation between language and ideology, understanding how the language produces senses for/to the subjects" (ORLANDI, op.cit., p. 15).

² Collection Folha de São Paulo available at <http://acervo.folha.uol.com.br/> and Collection O Estado de São Paulo available at <http://acervo.estadao.com.br/>

³ Last researcher access at both online collection July 22, 2016.

What the editorials say

The editorials analysed here are characterized by the use of IDEB results, published by INEP since 2007. In both newspapers, the editorials present that the implantation of this indicator was fundamental to define and characterize the reality of public education in Brazil, as it clears the editorial of “O Estado de São Paulo”:

The implementation of an efficient evaluation system was one of the greatest advances achieved by the country in the last two decades in the field of education. With the release of reliable and comparable statistics, such as the 2011 IDEB, it is now possible to prioritize and formulate education policies with the needed focus. And this is precisely what is expected of the government (O ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO, 2012)

In this sense, the use of students performance evaluation, which is a characteristic of the performativity described earlier, starts to be defended on these newspaper's editorials as a definition of quality education, that is, the legitimation of (practical context) the concept of quality established by external evaluations. We observed fragments of editorials in both newspapers defending this conception of quality:

As far as quality is concerned, education is bad. According to the International Student Assessment Program (PISA) exams, more than 60% of Brazilian students do not have adequate capacity in the area of science. In the most recent survey, focused on this issue, Brazil ranked 52th among 57 nations (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2010)

It is improving the quality of teaching offered in the public elementary school to students from 7 to 14 years old. This is what indicates IDEB for the period from 2005 to 2007. (O ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO, 2008)

Faced with this conception of quality where “the commitment to learning is replaced by performance goals” (BALL, 2012, p.44) is interesting to analyse the editorial's headlines from both these newspapers in the period in question (table 1).

By the headlines, we can observe that in most editorials there is a negativist view of ineffectiveness and low quality in public sector. Thus the terms: sad, crime, breakdown, muzzled, disaster, delay, precaution, and expressions: don't know what to do, lack of management and bad education, are used to disqualify Brazilian public education. Only two headlines show progress in public education: “Quality public schools” and “Evolution of teaching”.

From reading these editorials, through discourse analysis, we understand that public education has low quality because of the students' performance in national and international external evaluations. This low quality is a result of bad public management, as we can see in this excerpt

Chronic resources shortages and poor management of available funds are at the root of the educational problem. In addition to the financial issue, the poor quality of basic education takes place from technical and administrative factors. One of the factors is the changes promoted in public schools management, for political reasons, every exchange of state or municipal Secretary of Education.

Table 1: Editorial's headlines analysed from 2007 to 2016 from the newspaper "O Estado de São Paulo" and "Folha de São Paulo"⁴

"O Estado de São Paulo"		"Folha de São Paulo"	
2007			
"A portrait of state education"	29/apr	"A good plan"	18/mar
"Another portrait of education"	24/jun	"The basic of education"	22/apr
"The school health"	31/jul	"The plan and the teachers"	26/apr
		"From plan to plan"	07/jun
		"Certified education"	10/sep
		"Teacher missing"	13/nov
2008			
"The IDEB results"	13/jun	"Precation on IDEB"	04/jul
"Political and educational evaluations"	29/jun	"Evolution of teaching"	26/may
2009			
"Crime against new generations"	29/jun	-----	
2010			
"The IDEB from 2009"	06/jul	"Social Goals"	30/sep
2011			
"ENEM breakdown"	22/jan	-----	
2012			
"The status of education"	16/aug	"Status of Education"	12/feb
"MEC doesn't know how to do it"	20/aug	"Grade 5, and not even"	16/aug
"IDEB's change"	24/aug		
2013			

2014			
"The muzzled numbers"	24/jan	"Bad Education"	15/sep
"Quality public schools"	31/aug		
"IDEB and education disaster"	12/sep		
"The lack of management in teaching"	18/sep		
2015			

		"Education outside the box"	27/dec
2016			
The basic teaching in São Paulo"	14/feb	"Delay in education"	10/feb
Total – 16 editorials		Total – 14 editorials	

Source: Elaborated by the author.

Thus, there is no continuity in the educational policy and pedagogical projects of each school (O ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO, 2007).

Besides State inefficiency in education management, teachers are also responsible by the student's low performance because of lack of commitment and absence, or even for not performing well their professional activity. The teaching, in the editorials, is summarized to "pass" content, evaluate and correct:

Another factor is the lack of motivation and the high absenteeism of teachers, since in many states there are no programs for the valorization of teaching and professional re-qualification (O ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO, 2007).

⁴ The editorial's headlines were translated from the original by the Translator.

[...] the war for better education will be won. This will only be achieved with a retreat to the basics: to give real lessons, using the time available to explain the content selected and its usefulness; propose exercises about what was taught; correct mistakes made and explain why they are mistakes (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2015).

In the face of this calamity in public education presented in both these newspapers, the solution proposed by these communication vehicles is to adopt new managerialism practices, as we can see below,

Measures include priority for literacy at the right age, with a well-defined curriculum; production of own teaching material with pragmatic training for teachers to learn how to use it **effectively**; external evaluation with financial bonus for masters and schools with good **performance**. Another component of success is autonomy for principals and teachers to choose the means to achieve clear and measurable **goals**. (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 2015, emphasis added).

Through this excerpt, the terms efficiency, performance and goals are central elements to achieve quality education and “win” the inefficient, unproductive and without clear goals State. To achieve these objectives we have a triad definition of a quality education: single curriculum, professional training and external evaluation. Consequently, those that improve performance (teachers and schools) would have a bonus on their payment.

Lastly, the goal of a quality public education to these editorials is “[...] the formation of new generation, basic conditions for social emancipation and to put themselves on the job market [...]” (O ESTADO DE SÃO PAULO, 2009). This is the objective of quality public education, defended by these communication outlets, oriented to the maintenance of the political and economical capitalist system and not for social transformation and integral formation of the human being (SILVA, 2009).

Final considerations

In this article we tried to demonstrate how the IDEB implementation in 2007, allowed the use of its results by communication vehicles to give legitimacy to this quality indicator as well as to defend reform ideas in Brazilian public education.

From using the performativity and new managerialism concepts, defended by Ball, we can see that these educational reforms go through the change in school management. Therefore, in the analysed editorials, from the discourse analysis perspective, which comprehend texts in a ideological perspective (ORLANDI, 2015). Thus, the described editorials, in this text, spread the concept that public education is an inefficient, unproductive and without quality system, considering to this affirmations only the students performance in national and international external evaluations.

To improve public school quality, the newspapers, through their editorials, defend a school management reform, through a new managerialism, where efficiency, productivity and performance are the focus. To reach this reforms, the public education would need a single curriculum, train and subsidize teachers and managers, as well as to guarantee an external performance evaluation to students and teachers. The elements in this reform aims only in the market quality definition and the commercialization

of education that “legitimate and give a boost to certain commitments and actions – entrepreneurship, competition and excellence – at the same time inhibit and delegitimize others – social justice, equity, tolerance” (BALL, 2004, p.1122).

We finish this article with Mézáros words, who affirms that it would be naive to think that a radical transformation in education would occur through formal education which as taken by the market

To expect from the commodified society an active sanction - or even mere tolerance - of a mandate that encourages formal education institutions to fully embrace the great historical task of our time, that is, the task of breaking with the logic of capital in the interests of survival would be a monumental miracle. (MÉZAROS, 2008, p.45).

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