

**EDUCATIONAL PUBLIC POLICIES AND DEMOCRACY IN THE BRAZILIAN
POLITICAL SCENARIO**

***POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EDUCACIONAIS E DEMOCRACIA NO CENÁRIO POLÍTICO
BRASILEIRO***

***POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS EDUCATIVAS Y DEMOCRACIA EN EL ESCENÁRIO
POLÍTICO BRASILEÑO***

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ABSTRACT: This manuscript will analyze the relationship, not always explicit, between public educational policies and democracy, in order to reflect the understanding of the relationship in contemporary education and in the consolidation of the democratic state in Brazil. It is a narrative or critical review of the literature, structured in two parts. The first part is based on a synthesis of the role of the State in the conception and execution of educational policies and on the idea of thinking public policies ontologically. The second part is based on movements of reverberation, contextualization, generalization and synthesis of the discourse of the political scientist Yascha Mounk.

KEYWORDS: Public policies. Education. Democracy. Policy.

RESUMO: Este manuscrito analisará a relação, nem sempre explícita, entre políticas públicas educacionais e democracia, a fim de repercutir a compreensão dessas correlações na educação contemporânea e na consolidação do Estado democrático de direito no Brasil. Trata-se de uma revisão narrativa ou crítica da literatura, estruturada em duas partes. A primeira parte está assentada em uma síntese sobre o papel do Estado na concepção e na execução de políticas educacionais e na ideia de se pensar as políticas públicas ontologicamente. Já a segunda parte, alicerça-se em movimentos de reverberação, de contextualização, de generalização e de síntese do discurso do cientista político Yascha Mounk.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Políticas públicas. Educação. Democracia. Política.

RESUMEN: Este manuscrito analizará la relación, no siempre explícita, entre las políticas públicas educativas y la democracia, para reflejar la comprensión de esas correlaciones en

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la educación contemporánea y en la consolidación del estado democrático de derecho en Brasil. Es una revisión narrativa a crítica de la literatura, estructurada en dos partes. La primera parte está basada en una síntesis del papel del Estado en la concepción y ejecución de las políticas educativas y en la idea de pensar ontológicamente las políticas públicas. La segunda parte se basa en movimientos de reverberación, contextualización, generalización y síntesis del discurso del politólogo Yascha Mounk.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Políticas públicas. Educación. Democracia. Política.

Introduction

In several research, within the framework of studies on educational public policies, little is discussed about the relationship between public policies and democracy, as well as the impacts of this relationship on the education system and on the construction of citizenship in Brazil. This statement supports the development of this essay, organized in two parts, the first being based on a synthesis of the role of the State in the design and implementation of educational policies and the idea of thinking about public policies ontologically and the second part on movements of reverberation, contextualization, generalization and synthesis of the discourse of political scientist Yascha Mounk.

The role of the State in the conception and execution of educational public policies: from action to inaction in the face of the Neoliberal State

Studies on educational public policies have grown substantially, a fact that can be observed by the increase in research groups and publications in the area (MAINARDES, 2009; OLIVEIRA, 2010; SAVIANI, 2011). Although, according to Mainardes (2018), growth is still shy in Latin America, which ends up causing conceptual inaccuracies of various orders and a delay in relation to the repercussions and applications of scientific production in the educational system.

The researcher also claims that policies (and educational policies) are responses of the State (acts of the State or the federal government that represents it) to social demands and problems, often biased and with inherent defects, which transform politics into instrument of symbolic power.

That said, the most fruitful means of analyzing public policies, according to Stephen J. Ball (1950-1978), is to think about the ontological nature of politics, that is, to develop a more comprehensive reflection on its role in society, through responses arising from the exercise of

basic questions, such as: for what purpose, that is, for what goal, who are the people benefiting from a certain policy, what are its foundations etc.? (MAINARDES, 2018).

Therefore, the care taken to think ontologically the nature of policies favors less childish thinking, as public policies are not static. They change over time and according to the needs and interests of each era. The same thinking applies to educational policies that are also dynamic and strongly marked by socio-historical processes.

In Brazil, educational policies are subject to the Federal Constitution (FC) and the Law of Guidelines and Base for National Education (BRASIL, 1988; 1996). According to the Guidelines, the primary intention of educational public policies is to guarantee quality education through the acquisition and production of knowledge capable of guaranteeing the student autonomy of thought and full intellectual and social development (BRASIL, 1996). It is complemented that the sense of full development of the student for the State can be translated into the individual and collective capacity of citizens to build a society that produces goods and services and to contribute, directly or indirectly, to the flourishing and consolidation of the Nation State.

However, even though the intentions of educational policies seem commendable, they are debatable. For Afonso⁴ (2000) the State is fundamental for the conception and execution of educational policies, its strength, for a long time, considered fragile, if not non-existent, marked by the interests of the ruling class and by initiatives of subordination of the working class to capital.

On the other hand, Carnoy⁵ (1990) points out that for Marx and Engels the State as the author of its own interests and cannot be characterized as a mere instrument in the hands of the ruling class, having to identify and resist the assaults of control by the ruling class.

The idea of Marx and Engels can be perfectly framed today and associated with the speeches of sociologists Zygmunt Bauman⁶ (1925-2017) and Carlos Bordoní⁷, as the State has "emptied" its power considerably, generating economic and social crises, especially in countries with low- and middle-income (BAUMAN; BORDONI, 2016).

For sociologists, the Modern Nation-State, as an absolute agent, is collapsing, generating an unprecedented humanitarian and socioeconomic crisis with no end in sight. The

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driving force behind the crisis is the separation of power and politics, a fact caused by the State's retraction of social and economic regulatory frameworks (BAUMAN; BORDONI, p. 32).

In the words of sociologists, in the last half century, the process of deregulation originated, promoted and supervised by state governments, which voluntarily or obligatorily adhered to the so-called "neoliberal revolution", resulted in growing separation and the growing possibility of distance between power and politics. Much of the power previously contained within the borders of the Nation-State vanished into "[...] spaces of flows, while politics continued, as before, territorially fixed and restricted" (BAUMAN; BORDONI, p. 32, our translation).

The rupture of the State with power, transforms it into a simple leader of agendas, submitted by other entities, which exercise power in its place, leaving its social commitments to adhere to the needs of capital. In this way, the services previously provided by the State are now performed by companies and institutions of the private sector (BALL, 2013).

The way in which the State has passed the "baton" to other entities directly influences public policies for education, since the shift from government to governance gives voice and time to other interests in the political-legal process. The new governance practices favor an already very fine line between the public, private and third sector, building a fusion of "hierarchies, markets and heterarchies" (BALL, 2013).

Heterarchy is configured as a form of organization, at the intersection between hierarchy and network, which uses different horizontal links to make the elements of the political process cooperate (and/or complete each other) (BALL, 2013). The author maintains that there are numerous political heterarchies in education and they manifest themselves in different scenarios and perspectives, in the public sector, in education and in different locations in the Nation-State, forming an immeasurable group of agents with different interests who deliberate on educational policy.

Advancing on the subject, Ball (2013) relies on Marinetto (2005) to weave a critique about the changes in the form of government of the State, where, by its own will, it ceases to be master of its actions, becoming "dependent" of an extensive list of "state and non-state political" actors, inclined to the excesses of Capital.

Education policy has used a neoliberal state as a regulatory framework, which causes educational issues to undergo significant changes, that is, "[...] a change from an expansive state as a provider of public services to a minimal state: the hiring educational and instructional services from the private market" (BURTON, 2014, p. 316, our translation).

Changes, such as the partial privatization of the education sector, provide less supervision, do not guarantee the quality of education or the establishment of goals for improving quality. The fact that educational policy emerged in the neoliberal field did not lead to a complete reduction in the functions and dimension of the State and other actors in the elaboration of these policies. What really happened for Burton (2014, p. 317, our translation) was “[...] ideological change, in the role of the liberal democratic state and in the formulation of policies for education [...]”.

In view of the considerations, what is presented is a set of distinct interests, State, business and market, which are often divergent, which makes policy formulation a more hermetic and less stable process than it should have been.

Focusing on visible policy change can mask the most influential sources of power and highlight some actors at the expense of more discrete ones. Therefore, it is necessary to recognize the unspoken and ignored elements that guide the state. As the main actor in education sector policies in the last century has been the State, it makes sense, therefore, to examine its role and the different perspectives and interests associated with it (BURTON, 2014, p. 322).

Democracy, citizenship, crisis and rights

This section draws on the recurrent questions of the German-American political scientist Yascha Mounk about democracy, social rights and crisis, such as: what is democracy like and who does it cover? Does everyone, in fact, have the same rights? Do we know how to deal with democracy? (ALMEIDA, 2019).

In the search for answers to the questions, an article from 2010 entitled “*Os significados da democracia segundo os brasileiros*” (The meanings of democracy according to Brazilians) stands out, in which the author José Álvaro Moisés contextualizes and problematizes the effects of democracy and individualism in Brazil and criticizes the valorization excessive individual economic and social needs to the detriment of the virtues or values of democracy in the country.

The author's criticism raises other questions: does Brazilian democracy actually exist? And if so, who is it aimed at? Does a people who are not democrats understand the philosophical and political-legal bases of a democratic society, as well as the concepts associated with it? Does the population that does not contribute to generate wealth in the

country have the power of choice or voice to ask for changes, to enjoy democracy and the democratic rule of law? Who does the state serve?

A historical series of opinion polls on the concept of democracy in Brazil, between 1989 and 2006, demonstrates that the connection of the concept to the word freedom lost strength over time, in a movement inversely proportional to the association of the word to others, such as procedures and institutions (MOÍSES, 2010).

Establishing a temporal exercise, another question arises: what would be the answers to the same question, nowadays, where so many people have made empty objections to democracy, valuing their individual rights and minimizing their duties, without reflecting on the social setback if we come to lose it?

Recently, public acts for the return of Unconstitutional Article No. 5 (AI-5) and for the end of the quarantine imposed by the COVID-19 Pandemic in Brazil materialized the disbelief in democracy and fostered reflections on contradictions, inconsistencies, ruptures and strangeness, which permeated the speeches in these acts and boosted other underlying speeches - liars, poetic and humorous (BARROS, 2021; BRASIL 247, 2020; MOTTA, 2018).

Returning to the aforementioned historical series, although the acceptance of democracy has evolved (preference for Political Regime in Brazil: 71.4% democracy versus 14.2% dictatorship), the understanding is still worrying, as the variables that directly affect life of the citizen, such as freedom in moral, sexual, organizational and expression policies (trade unions and social movements), as well as less corruption and influence traffic and the existence of control bodies had less expression than the right to choose the government by free elections (MOISÉS, 2010).

Other relevant variables for the consolidation of public policies and the democratic rule of law had lower percentages than the right to choose representatives: social equality and the right to education (Idem). It should be noted that, in order to transform this scenario, citizens must be able to understand and face segregating democracy, which confers different rights on certain groups and minorities. In the words of Moses (2010, p. 302, our translation),

[...] the functioning of the democratic system, as well as its quality, requires public involvement with institutions and the monitoring of citizens - through the media, parties and civil society associations - on the performance of governments and public power.

Political scientist Yascha Mounk discusses the role of democratic governments in consolidating social rights and duties, freedom of expression and the exercise of citizenship. He claims that belonging to a democratic country, citizens have the right to express opinions

on public decisions, but they realize that “[...] their political participation is small in many cases. And wanting to change that is a very positive factor. The problem is that this claim benefits populists like Hugo Chávez and Bolsonaro” (MOUNK, 2019 *apud* ALMEIDA, 2019, p. 4, our translation).

Also, for Mounk, the perception of little or no political participation leads people to vote for authoritarian parties, which may come to control or limit this right, in a movement of unprecedented contradictions. It is increasingly noted how important the study and reflection on the history and contextualization of democracy is, in order to become aware of what would be taken away from us if we lost this “little democracy” that we have until now. The population no longer believes that their voice has power, and therefore populist candidates, who say exactly what they want to hear, gain power in this situation and generate crises of different kinds.

According to Bauman (2016, p. 13, our translation)

[...] “crisis”, in its proper sense, expresses something positive, creative and optimistic, as it involves change and can be a rebirth after a rupture. It indicates separation with certainty, but also choice, decisions, and therefore the opportunity to express opinions.

The individual sees the crisis as an opportunity for change, however, he often does not measure the consequences. He wants to escape the uncomfortable situation at any cost, putting his trust in some populist ruler, who purposely chooses words that please the electorate, making them one of them. Also, in the words of Bauman (2016) “the crisis is here to stay”, therefore the subject always tries to change crisis and choose the one he likes at that moment or just to get out of the situation in which he finds himself.

In the same scenario, Mounk (2019 *apud* ALMEIDA, 2019, p. 3, our translation) believes

[...] that democracy now faces its greatest challenge. People are losing faith in the system. They started to elect authoritarian leaders who attack the institutional order, with the excuse that they represent the popular will. So, the risk is much more complex and subtle, as it results from society's demands.

Given the situation pointed out by the political scientist, there is a social urgency for change, which makes society submit to authoritarian governments, chosen by themselves, through democracy, the right to vote. These governments affirm and reaffirm that they were elected by a majority of the votes, which is still true. This legitimizes and strengthens them to

make unreasonable decisions, as they represent a large portion of the population, which is frustrated with their purchasing power and their social position in relation to multiethnic democracy (ALMEIDA, 2019).

According to Mounk (2019 *apud* ALMEIDA, 2019, p. 4, our translation)

[...] the history of this democratic stability was linked to a high degree of racial, religious and cultural homogeneity". Democracy was not established to embrace all citizens, and when minorities become aware of their voice before the government, previously favored citizens call for interference that will diminish the democratic rights of all.

This thought is illustrated with a mistaken phrase by the current minister of education of Brazil (Milton Ribeiro) about access to universal higher education, the social function of the public university and public investment in the formation of higher education professionals, which remains in the same line of thought of the previous minister: "[...] universities come from the tax [...] this tax is used to pay the salary of professors, technicians, scholarships, food [...] I want to have more doctors, more engineers [...] I do not want a sociologist [...] philosopher with my money" (WEINTRAUB, 2020 *apud* REZENDE, 2020, our translation).

These statements directly reflect the thinking of a certain portion of the population, which values financial rationality in educational policy and does not recognize the social role of professionals in the humanities, much less their abilities to produce goods and services and to contribute substantially to vitality social, cultural and economic of societies.

Given this context and other narratives that detract from the social value of education, it is imperative to defend liberating education in schools, in explicit opposition to current attempts at political-ideological control and the return of technocratic rationality in education, since educational policy depends on social awareness and collective awareness of the socio-historical scenario and the interests of capital. It is noteworthy that ethics, social justice, democracy and scientific and social rationality can be forged by and in the educational process, being capable of reversing the established societal order and logic and of meeting the aspirations and needs of all people.

Final considerations

This manuscript problematized and echoed the view of researchers in the field of sociology on the influence of neoliberalism and attacks on democracy in the role played by

the Brazilian State in the conception and execution of educational public policies and in the construction of citizenship.

It was noted that it is not easy to distinguish and empirically track the relationship between public policies, democracy and education, as it involves conflicts of interest and power disputes that permeate the formulation of educational public policies, the social imagination and social responses to the following questions: Are the processes that involve the formulation of educational public policies putting the interests of the various social actors on the same level? If so, should this actually happen? If not, what has been pondered? Could there be prejudice in the formulation and development of public educational policies with neoliberal policies as a regulatory framework? For the formulation of educational public policies, what is the value of a more systemic view in relation to divergent points of view?

In the words of Mounk (2019 *apud* ALMEIDA, 2019, p. 6, our translation)

[...] we need to think about inclusive nationalism, at a point of balance between globalization and the modern nation-state. Multiethnic democracy, in which all citizens are treated equally, is an ideal that we cannot compromise. But that will only have an effect if we emphasize what the people of a country have in common, if we emphasize that everyone deserves their place in the sun because they are citizens. We need to fight discrimination and injustice, but separating people into particular groups that deserve such privileges for being part of these groups is a mistake that favors the populists and the understanding of the reality around us (**author's inclusion**).

The challenge is set. It's up to us to persist. We move forward in defense of democracy, the Constitution, the right to education and affirmative and inclusive educational public policies.

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