

PSYCHOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

Sérgio Antônio da Silva Leite ¹ 

SUMMARY

This text refers to the conference presented by the author at the opening of the XV CONPE, promoted by ABRAPEE, in July 2022. In the first part, the main conceptions about the role of the school in capitalist societies and their impacts on the practices developed are presented. We sought to understand whether the school represents a space for the performance of educators committed to the formation of critical and transformative citizens. Next, data are presented on the Brazilian educational reality, marked by the contradictions of a dualistic system and divided between privatist and publicist interests. In the second part, the concept of democratic school is analyzed from three dimensions: quantitative (school for all and permanence), qualitative (function and quality of teaching) and internal relations (collective work). Finally, it is argued that Psychology can have a fundamental contribution to the construction of the democratic school, provided that some conditions are assumed by psychologists: interdisciplinary action with educators, basically preventive work directed to educational planning and the overcoming of conservative theoretical conceptions, as the Medical Model.

Keywords: educational policy; democratic school; school psychology; role of the psychologist; collective work

La Psicología y la construcción de la escuela democrática

RESUMEN

El presente texto se refiere a la conferencia presentada por el autor en la apertura del XV Congreso Nacional de Psicología Escolar (CONPE), promovido por la ABRAPEE, en julio de 2022. En la primera parte, se presentan las principales concepciones sobre el papel de la escuela en las sociedades capitalistas y sus impactos en las prácticas desarrolladas. Se buscó comprender si la escuela representa un espacio a la actuación de los educadores comprometidos con la formación de ciudadanos críticos y transformadores. En la secuencia, se presentan datos sobre la realidad educacional brasileña, subrayada por las contradicciones de un sistema dualista e incluido entre los intereses privativos y publicistas. En la segunda parte, se analiza el concepto de escuela democrática, a partir de tres dimensiones: cuantitativa (escuela para todos y permanencia), cualitativa (función y calidad de la enseñanza) y de las relaciones internas (trabajo colectivo). Finalmente, se defiende que la Psicología puede tener una fundamental contribución a la construcción de la escuela democrática, desde que algunas condiciones sean asumidas por los psicólogos: acción interdisciplinaria junto a los educadores, trabajo básicamente preventivo direccionado a la planificación educacional y la superación de concepciones teóricas conservadoras, como el Modelo Médico.

Palabras clave: política educacional; escuela democrática; psicología escolar; papel del psicólogo; trabajo colectivo

A Psicologia e a construção da escola democrática

RESUMO

O presente texto refere-se à conferência apresentada pelo autor na abertura do XV Congresso Nacional de Psicologia Escolar (CONPE), promovido pela ABRAPEE, em julho de 2022. Na primeira parte, apresentam-se as principais concepções sobre o papel da escola nas sociedades capitalistas e seus impactos nas práticas desenvolvidas. Buscou-se compreender se a escola representa um espaço para a atuação dos educadores comprometidos com a formação de cidadãos críticos e transformadores. Na sequência, apresentam-se dados sobre a realidade educacional brasileira, marcada pelas contradições de um sistema dualista e cindido entre os interesses privatistas e publicistas. Na segunda parte, analisa-se o conceito de escola democrática, a partir de três dimensões: quantitativa (escola para todos e permanência), qualitativa (função e qualidade do ensino) e das relações internas (trabalho coletivo). Finalmente, defende-se que a Psicologia pode ter uma fundamental contribuição para a construção da escola democrática, desde que algumas condições sejam assumidas pelos psicólogos: ação interdisciplinária junto aos educadores, trabalho basicamente preventivo direcionado ao planejamento educacional e a superação de concepções teóricas conservadoras, como o Modelo Médico.

Palavras-chave: política educacional; escola democrática; psicologia escolar; papel do psicólogo; trabalho coletivo

¹ Universidade Estadual de Campinas – SP – Brasil; sasleite@uol.com.br



In July 2022, I received the honorable invitation to hold the opening conference of the XV CONPE, National Congress of School and Educational Psychology, promoted by ABRAPPEE¹. At that event, I developed some reflections about the subject, addressing aspects that, in my opinion, are crucial for all professionals in the educational field, including, obviously, psychologists who work in this important area of intersection between Psychology and Education. Without claiming to exhaust the subject, I present in this text the main issues analyzed.

A FIRST QUESTION: AFTER ALL, WHAT IS THE FUNCTION OF THE SCHOOL IN OUR SOCIETY?

Although this is a seemingly simple question, its answer has always been a complex issue. This is because, in addition to the lack of consensus among scholars and educators about the issue, it is observed that, historically, there have been different dominant conceptions in different historical moments of capitalist societies.

However, this issue is fundamental and must be the object of discussion and reflection by all professionals who work in the educational area, for the following reason: the concrete ways of acting of the various professionals involved in the educational area - for example, the way in which teachers, managers and other professionals work in a school - it largely depends on the ideas that these professionals have about the very function of the educational system - or, in other words, on the functions of the school itself. In fact, this relationship is not restricted to educational issues: we can generalize, stating that, in all areas of human activity, the ideas - theoretical bases - that subjects have, regardless of their degree of systematization, partly determine the way they deal with the respective objects in question.

In the educational area, perhaps the great doubt underlying this discussion is expressed by questions such as the following ones, which have been the object of reflection of several authors in recent decades, including educators and professionals in the area: is the school - in especially the public school - effectively, able to collaborate in the formation of critical and transforming subjects? Will schools, especially in capitalist countries, have the possibility of providing relevant experiences for their students, in order to commit to building a more just and humane society?

Bárbara Freitag (1986), has already offered us in the 70s of the last century important lessons about the subject discussed here, by demonstrating, for example, that the educational policies developed in different

countries inevitably reflect the existing conditions in the three great spheres: economic, political and social. Specifically: education always expresses a certain ideological foundation² - conception of Man, of the world, of human relations, of values, etc. - determined by an educational policy drawn up by dominant sectors of society. In capitalist societies, for example, this has been revealed in the continuous attempts of the State to direct the educational system towards the training of manpower, aiming to meet the demands of production, to the detriment of other options of political-pedagogical projects for schools.

Deepening the analysis, the author identifies some conceptions about the role of the school, especially linked to capitalist countries, which deserve our attention, mainly because several of them are present in speeches broadcast by the media, including professionals in the area, often without proper attention. critical.

Thus, one of the most widespread conceptions of school is related to its *socializing function*, defended by important authors such as Emile Durkheim (1972) and Talcott Parsons (1964). According to this position, the main function of education is to prepare the individual for life in society, assuming that Man is born as a selfish being. It would be up to the family and state institutions - such as the school - to guarantee the educational process, which should allow young people access to values, norms and accumulated experiences, in order to become a social being. Thus, Education is understood as a social fact, a necessary condition for the subject's adaptation process; according to Durkheim, it is the process through which personal selfishness is overcome and transformed into altruism that, ultimately, would benefit society itself.

Such a conception, currently, is quite questioned insofar as it represents a static and conservative view of education, focusing only on its character of transmission of knowledge necessary to maintain the structure and social functioning, that is, it only identifies its function of cultural reproduction.

² According to Werneck (1982, p. 60), "Ideology here will be considered as a phenomenon characteristic of the structure of thought that expresses the way in which the relationship lived by men is understood and that, therefore, manifests itself in every social relationship, in every social relationship. communication of men among themselves... It could become conscious... and it would, in short, be the characteristic of the common social relationship, which makes every interpretation of the facts be made according to a point of view". Being understood as the set of representations and values introjected from social relations - a typically human phenomenon - it is situated, therefore, as one of the determinants of behavior. Furthermore, it can disguise and hide the real conditions of the social situation, which can be overcome by the development and exercise of critical awareness.

¹ Opening conference held by the author at the XV CONPE - National Congress of School and Educational Psychology, promoted by ABRAPPEE, in July 2022.

Differing from these conceptions, there are authors such as John Dewey (1971) and Karl Manheim (1950) who defend an approach known as *pragmatism*. Unlike the purely adaptive function, these authors argue that the school has a fundamental role in preparing the individual for democratic life, which includes the social structures dynamization, through the innovative act of the individual himself. Thus, for Dewey, the school must organize itself as a small community, in which the student has the possibility of experiencing democratic relationships, which would later make it possible to transfer this learning to the democratic society in which he lives. Such school experience should provide for the possibility for students to improve democratic relations, which would also be a condition for real social life. Thus, Education would not only have an adaptive function, but would be a process that would ultimately enable the improvement of democratic society itself, in an environment in which it is assumed that individuals have the same chances and that competition, a social condition necessary for the progress of individuals, it is done through socially established and accepted rules. Consistent with liberal ideology, this conception defends the creation of conditions that guarantee equal chances for all, but rejects, as a matter of principle, the idea that individuals are equal; this means assuming that social inequalities are seen, basically, as a reflection of the natural differences existing among individuals.

Obviously, such conceptions are currently also heavily criticized insofar as they continue to preserve, for Education, a conservative character, of maintenance of the *status quo*, denying a possible innovative and emancipatory dimension of the educational process. The school would primarily be responsible for the adaptive and uncritical function of the individual to society.

A third conception, very common in these times of globalized economy, is the so-called *Education as Investment* or *Education Economy*, defended by authors such as Gary Becker (1964), Theodore Schultz (1971) and Robert Solow (1963). Based on empirical confirmation demonstrating high correlations between economic growth in capitalist countries and the educational level of citizens who are members of these societies, these authors defend Education as the third factor in the equation, in addition to capital and labor, which would explain the surplus growth of these economies. In other words, capital and labor alone would not be sufficient to explain the observed growth rates: the educational factor would be necessary to equalize the economic growth equation. From then on, in capitalist countries, investment in the training of *human resources* - the so-called human capital - grew, based on the logic that it would be up to the State to invest in the formation of the individual, since a qualified professional would

represent greater production and, therefore, greater profit margin, which would theoretically be reverted to the State and to the individual himself - through salary or services offered by the respective State.

The very contradictions of the capitalist system, as pointed out by several authors, have demonstrated the fallacy of these conceptions: the rate of return – profit – actually constitutes the surplus value that, as Marx (2013) points out, historically, has basically benefited the capitalist enterprise, which employs the workforce. Educational policies, centered on the idea of Education as Investment – which generated an emphasis on short, medium and long-term educational planning – have actually created conditions for the growth of corporate profit rates, with the qualification of the hand of work does not prioritize the improvement of workers' living conditions. In addition, for Bárbara Freitag (1986), educational planning has been an instrument of manipulation of the so-called *reserve army*, aiming, basically, at maximizing the profits of private capital and the containment of workers' wages, as well as the supply of work force necessary for each stage of the growth of capitalism process.

A fourth conception about the functions of education can be represented by an approach to *reproductive conceptions*, through the ideas of authors such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1975). For these authors, the functions of the educational system are mainly related to the maintenance of forms of reproduction of social relations of production. Bourdieu, specifically, attributes to the school the functions of cultural and social reproduction, insofar as it reproduces the ideology of the ruling classes and the social class division itself, through the perpetuation of a dualist teaching system: a school for the ruling classes and another school for the popular sectors. It should be noted that these processes always took place in an apparently neutral and often camouflaged way. Today, the process of social reproduction would occur, for example, through mechanisms of exclusion, extra- and intra-school, where, in an apparently natural way, the school promotes those who are more apt; exclusion is usually explained by factors intrinsic to the student himself, such as lack of skills, abilities, interest or, as more recently mentioned, family problems and poverty itself. It should be noted that, during the 20th century, psychologists themselves played a role that is currently much questioned, insofar as, based on the Medical Model (the causes of problems are always underlying individuals), they developed practices reinforcing conceptions that, ultimately, they placed the responsibility for school failure on the individual himself. As an example, traditional professional practices uncritically centered on the use of psychometrics and a psychodiagnostic model are cited,

which ended up transforming institutional issues into individual problems. A more complete analysis of this process was carried out by Patto (1990).

The criticisms presented to this conception have questioned whether the functions of the school would be limited only to social and cultural reproduction, which would not explain the way in which the capitalist State has increasingly interfered in the educational sphere, directing policy in the area, for example, towards the training of manpower, as the defenders of the previous conception propose.

The following conception deepens the *reproductive analysis* of the school, identifying the mechanisms of social inequality in capitalist systems and explaining the ideological character underlying the school's functions. These are the ideas strongly marked by Marxist references, defended by authors such as Louis Althusser (1970), Nicos Poulantzas (1973) and Roger Establet (1973). These authors extrapolate the functions of the school, reaching a broader critical analysis of the entire capitalist system, demonstrating the existing relationships among the educational sphere and the three instances: economic, social and political. Althusser (1970) is the theorist who characterizes the school as *an ideological apparatus of the state*, fulfilling the functions of reproduction of material and social relations of production: at the same time as it prepares the necessary labor to meet the demands of the forms of production capitalist, successfully carries out the inculcation of liberal ideology, which has the function of leading individuals to passively accept and justify the exploitative social relations to which they are subjected. In fact, for these authors, the school performs this task together with other ideological apparatuses, such as the family and the various social institutions, especially churches and the media; but such institutions do not produce the social division of classes: they only contribute to its occurrence. The division of classes is due to the forms of production and distribution of wealth, that is, it finds its genesis in the sphere of economic production. Recalling Marx (2013), the form of capitalist production reproduces and perpetuates the conditions of worker exploitation, with the help of ideological apparatuses, which, in turn, reproduce the liberal ideology underlying the capitalist system itself – a necessary condition for the reproduction of material conditions.

The criticisms made to these ideas, defended by the aforementioned authors, focus exactly on the characterization of the ideological apparatus, in the present case, the school. The conditions that made the emergence of these institutions possible and how they act to ideologically control the citizens are not clarified. Furthermore, based on Althusserian ideas, the school, as a mechanism for transmitting the dominant ideology,

could only see this function altered from the moment in which the control of the State was assumed, through the revolutionary path, by the dominated sectors, which would pass to use ideological apparatuses according to their interests – a position, in fact, consistent with the Marxist perspective: the working class, united and politically organized, would assume power, through the revolutionary path, instituting and inaugurating new social, political and economic relations. However, this would be to overestimate the role of the school as an instrument for the production and perpetuation of false consciousness, since we know that the mechanisms that determine social conflicts and class struggles are located in the spheres of economic production and not within the school, although there they also manifest. Thus, according to Bárbara Freitag (1986), these authors lack a clear analysis of this over determination in the role of the school: to maintain and reproduce the naive consciousness, in addition to the material and social relations of production.

As a consequence, in this conception, ways of overcoming this situation of over determination of the school are not identified; that is, for educators committed to the process of social transformation and overcoming relations of domination, the school would not be a priority space for the exercise of transforming militancy, given its peripheral character as an instance of overcoming social contradictions. The same can be said with regard to the oppressed classes: the school would not be placed, primarily, as an instance of social overcoming, according to the vision of these authors, because it is in the political and economic spheres that the confrontation of classes really happens, making possible to overcome socially unjust structures.

This conflict will be better analyzed in the last conception focused here, based on the ideas presented by Antonio Gramsci (Macchiocchi, 1977). The author, reviewing the concept of the State, proposes its organization in two instances: *political society*, in which powers, mechanisms of repression, courts, etc., are found, and *civil society*, in which the so-called private institutions are concentrated, such as churches, unions, media, etc., in addition to the school. Perhaps the main characteristic of civil society, pointed out by Gramsci, whether its ideological plurality, that is, it is a space where the ideologies present in a society circulate. In this sense, the ruling class, acting through political society, continually tries to spread its ideology – its world view – in civil society, in the process that the author calls *hegemony*. The hegemonic function would be built when the dominant class, through political society, managed to annul the counter-ideologies present in the institutions of civil society, imposing its ideology, guaranteeing, in this way, the consensus of the dominated sectors, which would end up accepting

the relations of domination as natural. This means assuming that, in practice, the ideological conflicts between the dominant and the dominated sectors of society effectively take place within the institutions of civil society: in this instance, the class struggle would, in fact, occur.

In this reading, it is evident the strategic importance that civil society institutions assume, especially the school, our object of analysis. If, in the previous conception, defended by the Althusserians, the school would play a marginal role in overcoming the social conflict between the dominant and dominated sectors, in the Gramscian view, the school, as well as other civil institutions, represents a social space where conflicts effectively occur. Ideological, which means placing it as a space of great importance for the performance of *organic intellectuals*, cited by the author. Paraphrasing Bárbara Freitag (1986), in capitalist societies, the political struggle can and should be fought primarily in civil society, which means, in practice, recognizing the importance of the existence, within the school, of educators committed to the so-called counter-ideology, that is, committed to conceptions of man and the world marked by values centered on justice, solidarity and human respect, in opposition to the unjust relations of domination, which inevitably mark the forms of capitalist production.

In a synthesis perspective, the different conceptions about the functions of the school in the capitalist society, presented above, allow some conclusions that should become objects of reflection for professionals who work in the educational area:

a) perhaps the most important conclusion to be made is related to the recognition that no educational policy is ideologically neutral; it is always based on certain conceptions of man and the world, on values and representations; it is not possible to think about the formation or education of man, disconnected from an ideological plane;

b) in the same sense, every educational policy is always a reflection of what happens in the economic, political and social dimensions of a society at a given historical moment; This explains why the State, in the different types of society, tries to have the maximum control over educational policies, through the creation of administration, management, training instances and, above all, the definition and control of the teaching content to be taught in schools;

c) the idea of institutional education is demystified as a panacea for man, the solution to all his problems, or even as the main or only factor responsible for the success or failure of the citizen, conceptions that are widespread by the media, especially in these times of predominance almost hegemonic of neoliberal conceptions and economic globalization. Without

denying the fundamental role of education in the constitution of subjects as citizens, one cannot forget that, in capitalist systems such as ours, the forms of production and distribution of wealth play a crucial role in determining the mechanisms of social development, with clear repercussions in the life stories of citizens; for example, social origin, a factor that has been widely researched in several areas of knowledge, has an indisputable and important role in the process of choice and professional development of subjects;

d) the school, on the one hand understood as an institution of transmission of values, given its inevitable ideological character, on the other hand it is also recognized as a space of continuous confrontation of ideas and values; cannot be seen, therefore, as a mere apparatus mechanically manipulated by the State as a function only of the ideology of the ruling classes: whether or not the State will succeed in its hegemonic attempt in relation to the school will depend on the existence, or not, of educators committed to counter-ideologies, acting within it, transforming this institution into a space for the continuous exercise of critical reflection based on transformative educational action;

e) in this perspective, it is assumed that the school is effectively constituted as an institutional space that can contribute to the process of awareness of individuals - an old dream defended by Paulo Freire (1971, 1979) - through the transformation of consciousness naive in critical consciousness, at the same time that it allows the subjects to appropriate the culturally accumulated knowledge, which will allow each student to constitute himself as a socially and historically determined subject, an agent of transformation committed to the construction of a more just and human;

f) such power of awareness of the school will basically depend on the educators and professionals who work there: on their ideological conceptions - vision of man, the world, society and the school itself - and the type of political-ideological commitment dominant in the school. group - whether they will act to maintain or overcome relationships marked by social injustice.

NOTES ABOUT BRAZILIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

When analyzing the literature on the history of educational policy in Brazil, a country with a capitalist system considered to be emerging, it is observed that the issues discussed above arise in a similar way. However, some aspects are highlighted, considered aggravating, which historically mark its uniqueness (Leite, 1995; Romanelli, 1978). Two of them deserve our attention: the first refers to the fact that our system has always been marked by *educational duality* - on the one hand, a good quality school, aimed at students from the economically dominant classes and, on the other, a school for the poorest sectors, with the worst

quality, which today is represented by public education. A second aspect to be highlighted here refers to the almost secular conflict observed in the educational area between defenders of public education and defenders of private education. It is worth identifying and discussing these issues a little more, in a brief historical synthesis of Brazilian educational policy.

The 30s of the last century, in our country, are characterized as the period of predominance of the developmental model marked in the economy by the process of import substitution and implementation of industrial production; in the political and social dimensions, power was divided between the agricultural landowners and the rising industrial bourgeoisie, but already with the emergence of the financial bourgeoisie and the beginning of the constitution of the working class, formed by urban and rural workers. Educational policy, in turn, is marked by a process of increasing State intervention, highlighting, as an example, the creation in 1930 of the Ministry of Education and Public Health Affairs - an important decision by the State to guide educational policy to meet the demands of industrial modernization. In this period, the National Education Plan stands out, organizing higher and secondary education, defining primary education as free and compulsory and religious education as optional - provided for in the 1934 Constitution. On the other hand, the 1937 Constitution, during the *Estado Novo*, it provided for professional education and moral and political education, demonstrating the concern to strengthen the direction of the educational system for the training of manpower and for ideological control.

The following moment, involving the 40s and 60s, is characterized in the literature as the period of the populist/developmentalist state. In the economy, there was a growth in the production of consumer goods and national industry, leveraged, in part, by World War II, in addition to the significant emergence of foreign capital. In civil society, the creation of major political parties stands out, representing the main sectors of society, while the political dimension was marked by the alliance between the national business community and the popular sectors, during most of the period, until the fragmentation of this pact with the creation of a new alliance, now between the national bourgeoisie and the interests of foreign capital.

In the educational area, the process of State intervention in educational policy continues: industrial education is instituted – with the Senai and Senac systems – in addition to the elaboration of the organic law of secondary, commercial, primary, normal and agricultural education. However, the so-called duality of the educational system persists and accentuates throughout the period: half of the population simply did not have access to school (the country had a rate of

50% of illiterates) and public education demonstrated a markedly elective character, serving, basically, students from the middle and upper classes. In turn, the conflict between a public who defends public schools versus a public who defends private schools will develop around the struggle for the elaboration of the Law of Directives and Bases of Education – a process that lasted from 1946 to 1961. In the final text of the Law, interests of both sectors are met, but its conservative character is remarkable, from the point of view of the marginalized sectors of the population: on the one hand, the Law provided for the participation of private capital in education, financial aid from the State to the private network and omitted the free education; on the other hand, it guaranteed the leveling of levels, an old popular aspiration. In fact, the LDB of 1961 (Law 4024): collaborated to reinforce the selectivity of the school system, reducing the participation of low-income sectors and facilitating the upper class; created conditions for increased privatization of education, facilitating the infiltration of the private sector at all educational levels; distorted the professionalization proposal, insofar as this instance constituted itself, in fact, as a disguised propaedeutic teaching. Thus, it is not by chance that the period in question ends with serious problems: on the one hand, the inadequacy of professional education, whose policy did not succeed due to incompetence and lack of political will; on the other, a strong pressure from the middle class towards the then restricted university education, which will be resolved, in the following stages, with the massive participation of private capital in higher education.

As already pointed out, with the end of the developmental period and the fragmentation of the entrepreneur x workers social pact, political radicalization in the country increases, with the consequent economic crisis, creating the conditions for the military coup of 64, strongly influenced by the interests of the foreign capital. From there, an economic policy was implemented that was frankly favorable to the interests of international capital and the country's economically dominant sectors. Such a policy reorganizes the production system (through the aristocratization of consumption and expansion of exports), emphasizes technological development (to the detriment of an economic policy aimed also at the popular sectors), creates a new elitist consumer market (new class of intellectuals, technocrats, national bourgeoisie to the detriment of a policy of democratization of consumption), strengthens exports (to the detriment of the internal market), increases dependence on external know-how and implements a policy of freezing wages, through the creation of an army of labor reserve, practically in all sectors of the economy. Thus, the so-called period of the Brazilian miracle, in

reality, was a stage characterized by the monopolization of the economy, exploitation of workers and a strong repression scheme trying to block the initiatives of popular organization and political opposition. The consequences of this whole process have become visible until the present day: we have an economy marked by one of the largest processes of income concentration in the world, in a country that experienced, in the period in question, strong economic growth (increase in wealth), but a meager process of economic development (social distribution of the wealth produced).

In this process, educational policy played a fundamental role, manipulated by a dictatorial state that tried to assume, in every way, the ideological control of civil society institutions. During the period, the famous MEC USAID³ agreement stands out, meaning the attempt to submit Education to the interests of foreign capital, with two main characteristics to be highlighted: the direction of educational policy to meet the interests of economic growth and the effort to use the school as a mechanism of ideological control. It was not by chance that the control of the country's educational policy came to be ultimately determined by economists. The two main objectives initially proposed were: a) expansion of the offer of Elementary Education, to guarantee the minimum formation and qualification of the population, b) the formation of qualified labor, through the expansion of the higher education system, which occurred with the presence of private capital. As a consequence, there is an increasing and gradual decrease in public investments, accentuating the process of the State's disengagement in relation to Education. This situation persists during the 70s, until the mid-80s, which is considered the lost decade for education. As examples that reveal the tragic picture of education, here are some data from the end of the period: the country had 30% of illiterates, 23% of teachers were lay people, 30% of children were without school and 50% of public school students had a history of repetition. However, even after the military regime, the educational policy remained similar to the inherited model. The 1988 Constitution, as well as the 1996 LDB, did not essentially change the framework of Brazilian education, although it provided what some authors consider an institutional framework for changes. In the case of the new LDB, it neither prevents nor obliges the State to assume its responsibility in the maintenance and financing of the educational system, thus keeping the conditions of conflict between the defender of private and defenders of public education unchanged.

However, it should be noted, as a matter of historical justice, that, throughout the aforementioned period, several civil society institutions – such as SBPC, ANPED,

ANDES, CNTE, CBE⁴, etc. – were critically opposed to the educational policy adopted, defending banners such as improving the quality of teaching, teacher qualification and valorization, democratization of management, funding of education by the State, expansion of compulsory education, among others.

THE 90S: NEOLIBERALISM, GLOBALIZATION AND EDUCATION

In the 1990s, a series of ideas were imported from England that were directly contrary to the values that had prevailed there since the post-war period. Conceptions such as social, educational and health well-being, hitherto maintained by the State, will succumb to a series of concepts, inspired by the ideas of Friedrich von Hayek, defending the minimal State, decentralization, privatization, deregulation and the global economy – in short, this set of issues not always clear, but with great impact, which became known ideologically as *neoliberalism*. Reginaldo Moraes (Moraes, 2001) teaches us that this concept is constituted as an ideology, a way of seeing the world, a current of thought, centered on valuing concepts such as competition, market, structural unemployment, which characterize the modern economy, against which it would be useless to try to oppose. Neoliberals strongly defend the idea of an open society, and the presence of the State, especially in the economic spheres, is always understood as a threat to individual freedom and competition, conditions directly responsible for human progress. In the same way, they fight against nationalist, developmental and populist ideologies, very common in third world or developing countries. As Moraes analyzes, from a gloomy diagnosis, neoliberalism advocates strong state action against unions and corporate institutions, prioritizing a monetarist anti-inflationary policy and reforms oriented to the reality of the market.

Interestingly, neoliberals will attribute to education a fundamental and determining role in shaping the conditions of competition among the countries. They believe that education is one of the main instruments to contain poverty, as long as it is directed to and by the market.

In this sense, several important international meetings about the educational issue were held in the 1990s, under the sponsorship of recognized institutions linked to the international capitalist system. Among the events, it is worth mentioning the World Conference on Education for All, in Jomtien (Thailand), in 1990, in which Brazil participated, being one of the 155 governments

³ United States Agency for International Development.

⁴ SBPC – Brazilian Society for the Progress of Science; ANPEP – National Association for Research and Graduate Studies in Education; ANDES – National Association of Higher Education Teachers; CNTE – National Confederation of Workers in Education; CBE – Brazilian Education Conferences.

that signed the approved declaration. Two major decisions were taken at the Conference, as commitments to be met by the signatory countries: a) ensure quality basic education for all, b) meet the Special Learning Needs (NEBA) of children, youth and adults. Rosa Maria Torres (Torres, 1995) defines the NEBA as those theoretical and practical knowledge, capacities, values and attitudes that are fundamental for the subject to face his basic needs in seven situations: survival, full development of his capacities, dignified life and work, full participation in development, improved quality of life, informed decision-making and the possibility to continue learning. The main consequence for the Brazilian educational policy was the effort towards the universalization of Elementary Education, that is, education for all was understood as the possibility of broad access to fundamental education. It must be recognized, however, that this concept of *education for all* was not consensual among the countries present at the Conference, which led to different emphases in the educational policies developed.

At the same time – 1990 – a document from ECLAC – Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – warned of the need for educational changes to meet the restructuring of the productive system of the countries in the region. Adjusting the educational system means reviewing the specific knowledge and skills required by the productive system, to be assumed as a task for the school.

One of the international institutions that assumed a prominent position in the neoliberal scenario was the World Bank, which became one of the main international project financing agencies. Created after World War II, it was an organization that, at the time, had 176 borrowing countries, including Brazil. However, only five countries determined their policies, as they participate with 38% of the Bank's resources: the USA (20%), Japan, Germany, France and the United Kingdom. Brazil participated with approximately 1.7%. In fact, due to this imbalance, the World Bank ended up constituting itself as an instrument of US foreign policy, but with a lot of international force, as it became the world's largest fundraiser, moving about 20 billion dollars annually.

In 1995, the World Bank proposed policy guidelines for the educational area, in the document *Priorities and Strategies for Education*. It highlights guidelines that have become common in recent Brazilian educational policy: implementation of learning assessment systems, investment in human capital, decentralization of administration, efficiency in social spending and articulation with the private sector. In fact, scholars in the area interpreted that the real intention was to adapt educational objectives to the new demands of the international and domestic markets, in addition to consolidating production processes, forming adaptable

workers, capable of acquiring new knowledge, meeting economic demands and changes. from the market.

The effects of the World Bank's proposals on Brazilian educational policy are evident. This process has been growing since the 1990s and can be seen in several aspects: in financing (through programs such as Fundef, Fundescola etc.), in evaluation (Censo, Saeb, Enem, Provão⁵ etc.), in management (programs such as municipalization, training programs, etc.). In other words, we can safely say that almost all the country's educational policy is linked to the guidelines of the World Bank and the IMF (Neves, 2000; Shiroma, Moraes, & Evangelista, 2004).

THE CONTRADICTIONS OF BRAZILIAN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

It is undeniable that there have been advances in recent decades in the context of Brazilian educational policy: the system has grown, almost universally serving children between the ages of 7 and 14, early childhood education is recognized as an important instance, investment is being made in training teacher, there was a reduction in the percentage rates of illiteracy etc. However, if there was investment in the quantitative growth of the educational system, we are undoubtedly far from a democratic system when the evaluation involves qualitative aspects. Despite the government effort, most educators are critical of the direction of educational policy, as the system still presents enormous problems that pose immense challenges to educators and society in general:

- although official data indicate a general illiteracy rate in Brazil of around 7% (about 11 million illiterates, according to the 2019 PNAD), data from the NGO Instituto Paulo Montenegro / IBOPE indicate that only 26% of the Brazilian population is fully literate, able to read texts with more than one information, suggesting that ¾ of the population can be considered *functionally illiterate*⁶;

- still according to the same source, only 23% of our population can solve problems that involve more than one mathematical operation;

- according to UNESCO, 23% of our 1st grade children and 20% of 2nd grade children repeat;

- according to Saeb, 55% of 4th grade students. grades are at the critical level in the reading area; only 5% of these children showed adequate reading

⁵ FUNDEF – Fund for the Development and Valorization of the Teaching; FUNDESCOLA – School Strengthening Fund.

SAEB – Basic Education Assessment System; ENEM – National High School Exam.

⁶ The concept of Functional Illiterate refers to individuals who do not functionally use reading and writing in their social practices, despite mastering linguistic codes.

performance;

- since the first edition of the Saeb in 1995, the average results of students in Portuguese and Mathematics are increasingly negative, showing no signs of recovery in any year during this period;

- 2/3 of our students, aged 14, are behind in their schooling, according to MEC data;

- of the nearly 6 million students who enter the 1st grade of elementary school, only 2.5 million reach the 1st grade of high school, according to INEP data;

- in higher education, according to the MEC, the picture is no less tragic: our enrollment rate is 20% of young people in this age group, while in Argentina it is 61%, in Chile it is 43%, in Venezuela it is 39% and in Peru, 32%.

Given this reality, with such indicators, we can conclude that there is a picture of bankruptcy – or pre-bankruptcy – in Brazilian education, despite what is presented by official propaganda. This reality gives us the impression that the future of our country is literally at stake, since we are not being able to take care of the greatest asset a nation can have: the education of its people and young people in particular. This reality deserves to be contrasted with the neoliberal proposals underlying current policies.

It is indisputable that there is no consensus regarding the diagnosis of this crisis, especially when comparing the guidelines and guidelines of the World Bank / IMF with the analyzes of educators who study this reality. It cannot be accepted that the deterioration in Education is basically due to the lack of resources, but it is certainly related to the inefficiency of its management, a situation, in fact, historical and persistent in the political-educational reality in our country. Likewise, the IMF assumption that education is the universal panacea, the only instrument that can improve the lives of individuals, is unacceptable. What the documents do not make explicit is that neoliberalism has been constituted as an economic model of an excluding nature for a large portion of the population, which has increasingly deepened the process of income concentration. It is a fallacy to argue about the efficiency of education as if it were, by itself, capable of promoting the development of the economy and the well-being of individuals. In saying this, we are not denying the importance of a democratic and efficient educational system for the country and its people; on the contrary. But we are recognizing that the mechanisms of social development pass, primarily, through the forms of production and distribution of wealth, expressed in the economic and political dimensions of capitalist countries. As an example, one can place the case of neighboring countries, such as Argentina and Uruguay, in these times of neoliberalism: they never invested so much in education, but, at the

same time, they never had so many citizens below the poverty line.

The contradiction is not restricted only to the instance of ideas. If education were really a priority area, as the official propaganda in our country presents, this would certainly be expressed in the larger budget allocation for the sector. In the case of Brazil, according to the Ten Year Plan (Law 10,727), the State should invest up to 7% of GDP in Education. What, however, has been observed is a progressive reduction in recent governments, with this investment being around 4%. Despite the State claiming concern with the quality of education, it pays low salaries to teachers; complains about their competence, but recommends more students per class. And so the contradictions remain.

THE CHALLENGES FOR THE BUILDING OF A DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

The literature analysis of official data on the Brazilian educational system demonstrates that there is still a long way to go in the construction of a democratic school. But, what would a democratic school be? What are your characteristics?

In this sense, three dimensions considered relevant for a democratic school will be addressed, without, obviously, the intention of exhausting the subject.

1. *Quantitative dimension.* A democratic educational system must meet at least two conditions: a) the State must provide free public schools for the entire population, regardless of the existence of private education; b) the educational system must be planned in such a way as to guarantee the conditions for all students to effectively remain in school until the end of high school. However, when analyzing the situation of Brazilian public education in this dimension, it is faced with a less encouraging picture. Our system still has the well-known “educational funnel”: according to the PNAD, more than half of people aged 25 and over have not finished elementary school; there are still the famous “bottlenecks”, mainly among the different levels of education; in 2012, the average schooling of Brazilians was 11.8 years, below that of several Latin American countries. It should be remembered that, although school exclusion is a by-product of social and economic conditions, there are numerous studies that identify the so-called intra-school factors as determinants of the process.

2. *Qualitative dimension.* On the other hand, it is not enough to have a school; it is necessary that it fulfill a really relevant function: what knowledge and experiences should be privileged to students so that the full exercise of citizenship is possible, in a critical and transforming perspective? Although this may seem obvious, a more careful analysis of the contents covered by the school demonstrates that

there are historical problems regarding this issue: the educational system has been directed to meet the interests of privileged minorities and, recently, those of big capital. For decades, the educational policy has prioritized training for the job market, in an ideological perspective, according to which the human being is seen basically as a being that produces and consumes, to the detriment of other human dimensions⁷. In this work, the idea is defended that the democratic school must develop a relevant and functional systematized knowledge for the lives of all citizens of our society, so that they act in a critical and conscious way, constituting themselves as agents of transformation, aiming at to a more just and humane society. Quoting Saviani (1991, p. 21), “the object of Education concerns, on the one hand, the identification of cultural elements that need to be assimilated by individuals of the human species, so that they become human and, on the other hand, concomitantly, to discover the most appropriate ways to achieve this objective”. Therefore, “the school is an institution whose role is to socialize systematized knowledge” (p. 22) and not just any knowledge; it is about elaborate knowledge and not simply spontaneous and fragmented knowledge.

3. *Dimension of democratic internal relations.* It concerns the structure and functioning of the school, involving internal relationships. When one currently observes a public or private school functioning, usually one of the characteristics that stand out is the solitary and individual work of the teachers. For numerous reasons, the classroom has become a private manor where the teacher works in isolation and without considering the general process to which the student is subjected, inside and outside the school. Obviously, such a model of organization is not haphazard or random. In fact, it was inspired by the forms of organization that characterized capitalist industry in the first half of the last century, according to the ideas of Ford and Taylor – organizational processes known as Fordism and Taylorism – and which gave rise to the production line in the factories. The principle is well known: if each worker performs well his part of the production process - which is planned by a group of specialists for that function - then the final product will be of good quality. That is, the whole is equal to the sum of the parts. However, this model ended up generating a high degree of

⁷ It is worth remembering that Vygotsky (1987) already proposed that one of the main functions of the school would be access to scientific concepts. For him “Scientific concepts seem to constitute the medium in which consciousness and mastery develop, being later transferred to other concepts and by other areas of thought. Reflex consciousness reaches the child through the portals of scientific knowledge” (p.79). It is evident, for the author, the relationship between school learning and the mental development of children, contents and experiences that the family can hardly mobilize.

alienation in workers, with disastrous consequences for the production process itself, among other problems, insofar as the worker loses the notion of the function of his role, as he has no vision of the process. global – in other words, the worker loses consciousness of his own work. On the other hand, the Fordism model applied in schools produced notorious negative consequences: it created enormous difficulties for the development of pedagogical proposals, insofar as it led educators to lose the view that Education implies collective action and, as such, must be planned and developed.

It is recognized that, currently, one of the biggest challenges facing the construction of a democratic school is the rescue of collective work in school organization, a fundamental condition for the development of any project or pedagogical proposal. A reorganization at this level implies an effective and necessary review of power relations within the institution. The underlying principle is known: all educators have the right and the duty to participate in the decision-making levels that affect their pedagogical work. This is a condition for establishing a compromise among educators and the pedagogical proposals developed.

It is urgent, therefore, that the educators who work in the school take on this challenge as the great utopia that must direct their actions in the current times: the construction of collectives of educators in the school to plan, develop and accompany the pedagogical projects that must mark the functioning of a democratic school, in the terms outlined here.

It is worth addressing some examples related to the absence of collective work: how is the issue of school literacy generally developed in schools? As a rule, the issue is reduced to discussion – usually innocuous – about the methodology to be followed and the booklet to be adopted, remembering that each teacher has autonomy of choice. Obviously, such a stance can be considered totally reductionist in relation to the issue, insofar as it limits the literacy process to a short period of schooling in which the objective focuses on mastering the symbolic system of writing. However, if the literacy process is thought from the perspective of the constitution of the student as an autonomous reader and producer of texts, the issue completely changes its perspective, requiring a pedagogical project that addresses from preschool to high school, which requires a collective action of teachers, around common pedagogical guidelines, that involves from the conception of reading and writing, understanding of their process, methodological guidelines, goals and objectives to be achieved - in short, a literacy project centered on writing as a condition for the exercise of citizenship by students.

Likewise, keeping the differences in content, a similar problem can be considered in relation to the

development of mathematical thinking in students, or of scientific thinking, or the formation of an aesthetic sense, regardless of the curriculum concept used. This requires the formation of collectives of teachers who plan their practices around common guidelines assumed by the group – it is, therefore, a condition for the construction of a democratic school, as outlined here.

It should be noted that the role of management in this context is fundamental, given that organization is not a spontaneous process, but must also be planned according to the concrete conditions identified in the institutions. Director and coordinator stand as crucial professionals for the organization of teachers in collectives.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF PSYCHOLOGY TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC SCHOOL

Observing the data on professional performance in the various areas, one could assume that Education would already be a well-structured field for Brazilian psychologists. There has certainly been great progress in this area, as evidenced by the publications and CONPE promoted by ABRAPEE.

However, it is always important to remember that the situation has not always been favorable for school and educational psychologists. In 1988, the first survey about the profile of the Brazilian psychologist, promoted by the Federal Council of Psychology, pointed to Education as the fourth area of choice, behind Clinic, Teaching and Organization. Among the psychologists who worked in the educational area, the research identified about 16 different professional activities, among which 10 could be characterized as practices in the Clinical area, such as care for learning disorders, psychological counseling, application of tests, psychodiagnosis, etc. Among the others, project planning, personnel monitoring, curriculum evaluation and training of paraprofessionals stood out.

In order to understand this framework, it must be considered that, historically, the role of the psychologist in the area of Education arises in the wake of the implementation of the modern capitalist industrial society, when changes in the forms of production begin to demand from workers certain “personality aptitudes and traits”, as a condition of efficiency at work. In this sense, Galton’s psychometrics laboratory, at the end of the 19th century, has been pointed out as a starting point for the current School Psychology. There, issues related to so-called individual differences and the development of intelligence and personality were studied. In the same vein, Binet and Simon, at the beginning of the 20th century, developed their famous test, aiming to detect, in the school-age population, at the request of the French government, children who should receive different treatment due to some

identified psychological problem.

Patto (1984) states that Psychology

born with the mark of a demand: to provide concepts and scientific measuring instruments that guarantee the adaptation of individuals to the new social order. Based on the new emphasis of experimental psychologists about psychic phenomena, the newly inaugurated science makes clear its purpose of adaptation carried out through selection and guidance at work and at school. (p. 96).

Regarding Binet’s work, the author points out that the aforementioned scientist

could not suppose that he was laying the foundations for a procedure that would be the main activity of psychologists throughout the century: classifying individuals, especially children of preschool and primary school age, in another sense of the term classification: to justify their distribution into social classes. (p. 97).

This is how School Psychology was born: hand in hand with psychometrics, developing a set of activities in which the assessment of readiness, organization of students in classes, diagnosis and monitoring of children with learning problems stand out. However, underlying these practices, the true purpose of the work is identified: adaptation of the student to the school, which, in principle, is assumed to be adequate.

In addition, it should be noted that this entire process developed strongly influenced by the so-called Medical Model, that is, a set of theoretical concepts that prioritize internal or underlying factors as the main determinants of behavior, minimizing the role of environmental factors, mainly the mediate ones, of a socio-economic-cultural nature. Due to their characteristics, the practices based on the Medical Model turned to the so-called pathologies, considering behavioral deviations as such, based on a phylogenetically determined concept of normality. As a consequence, such conceptions contributed a lot to the professional performance of psychologists in remedial terms, seeking, primarily, in the individual the causes of the so-called psychological problems.

At this point, one should question the reasons why this traditional model, so harshly criticized today, has still dominated the practices of a small portion of Brazilian psychologists who work in the educational area. I understand that the question is basically ideological in nature. The Medical Model was very successful probably because it was very close to the liberal ideology, underlying the capitalist system of production, whose central core is the concept of

individualism - men are born with different potential, which leads to the assumption that some have better conditions for learning and development than others, being, therefore, a natural process. In this perspective, institutions are spared, and the origin of problems is essentially sought in individuals, either through intrinsic factors (emotional, motivational...), or for reasons of inadequate relationship with their environment (inadequacy, lack of repertoire...).

Obviously, such liberal conceptions have already been widely criticized in their basic characteristics (view of man, of the world, role of the state, etc.) by several areas of knowledge, making it clearer, for example, the conception that, in a society of classes, like ours, the process of social ascension (and why not say, of school success) is much more determined by the socioeconomic origin of the individual than by intrinsic factors (intelligence, potential, etc...). In the same way, psychological science itself has demystified a large part of the beliefs of the Medical Model, through research and theories demonstrating that the environment (concrete living conditions) has a much more important role than was supposed, in the genesis and development of diseases called psychological problems.

In the case of School Psychology, the criticism has been similar: it is no longer possible to explain, for example, learning difficulties through, basically, factors intrinsic to children. Numerous studies carried out from the second half of the last century, have shown that such difficulties, for the most part, are related to problems of school planning and organization, inadequate pedagogical practices, processes of discrimination against children from socially marginalized sectors, problems in the relationship teacher/student, inadequate curricula, inadequate working conditions, excessive bureaucracy, lack of resources, etc... and a State that, historically, has not considered public education as a priority.

Given the above, it can be said that the role of the psychologist in the educational area, consistent with the process of democratization of the school, implies their engagement with other professionals in the area, in order to ensure that the institution fulfills its intended function. Specifically, I have defended – in fact, for a long time – the idea that the great challenge for professionals working in Education is the democratization of the school, in its quantitative, qualitative and internal relations dimensions. The same challenge arises for psychologists: only engagement in this collective effort can justify their presence in the educational field.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that, for the school to properly perform its function, the participation of different areas of knowledge, including Psychology, is necessary. Thus, the great perspective for the psychologist is outlined: the democratization/socialization of psychological knowledge, that is,

enabling educators, especially teachers, to have access to accumulated psychological knowledge, considered necessary for the school's major task: access to knowledge systematized, fundamental for the exercise of citizenship in a critical and transforming perspective.

It is undeniable that Psychology presents an accumulation of important knowledge for the school to fulfill its social function. Although it recognizes that it is not up to Psychology to determine the teaching objectives – as these are decisions of a different nature – the area has much to contribute in relation to the teaching and learning process. After all, we research Human Development and Learning, we build theories that allow us to contribute to the educational process experienced by students in schools. Likewise, we have accumulated a great deal of knowledge about group processes, which is fundamental for the construction of collectives of educators in schools. We have a considerable arsenal of research methodologies, both quantitative and qualitative, essential for the interventions of professionals in the area.

However, this process of intervention by the psychologist in the school, in view of the issues exposed here, suggests some important implications. First, the recognition that this action will only be relevant if it is primarily developed in interdisciplinary terms, working with other professionals in the area, especially the teacher. A second issue is to recognize that psychological knowledge must be directed, primarily, to support educational planning actions, as a strategy for building a democratic school as outlined here; this involves the continuous critical review of educational objectives, content and practices, in addition to the structure and functioning of the institution. A third implication, no less important, is the overcoming of inadequate theoretical models, such as the Medical Model, already discussed here. In the same sense, such action requires from Psychology professionals an educational background, with a critical view of the educational policy developed in our country, in addition to the pedagogical knowledge observed in schools, which will enable a clear view of the education process.

Finally, it would remain to discuss whether the training that Psychology professionals receive in their respective undergraduate and training courses for Psychologists has enabled their insertion in the educational area, aiming at the construction of a democratic school. Although this aspect does not fall within the scope of this work, it should be remembered that, currently, there are around 1071 Psychology courses⁸ in our country, of which 85% are maintained by private education. As optimistic as it may be, it is

⁸ Information from the Brazilian Association of Psychology Teaching – ABEP.

evident that one of the central problems refers to the process of continuing education of psychologists, an area in which scientific and professional institutions play a fundamental role.

IN SUMMARY

The changes observed in the educational area, mainly from the 1990s onwards, seem to have ideologically involved almost the entire population, including a large part of the educators, gradually, through the exemplary use of official propaganda through the media. However, a closer analysis clearly demonstrates that the changes had a fundamentally privatizing character, through the imposition of the logic of the market, as if man were just a being that produces and consumes. The State has justified the enormous participation of the private sector with the thesis that Education is a public issue, but not necessarily a state issue; and with this logic, it has been gradually letting go of its historic obligation to create and maintain a democratic educational system for the entire population.

It remains to reiterate the doubts presented at the beginning of this text: in this analyzed situation, is it still possible to think of the educational system as a space for the formation of critical and transformative individuals? How should educators have committed to building a fairer and more inclusive society act within the school? In the case of psychologists, what are the alternatives to act at the intersection with Education, in an emancipatory way?

Without claiming definitive answers, we argue that whatever alternatives are proposed, they must be the result of a process of deep reflection and confrontation of values, especially those underlying neoliberalism. A process that makes it possible to critically review the representations and conceptions we have about man himself, about the society we want to transform and build, about the role of the State and the school, about the process of knowledge production and its function, about the relationship family / school, about the values that the school cannot exempt itself from working with its students, in short, a process that allows a wide oxygenation of our political and ideological references. And that this reflective process takes place in a collective dimension, preferably within the school itself, involving the community and educators committed to education and who dream of the possibility of transforming the world through their educational action.

If psychologists intend to constitute themselves as a socially important category, in the context of the current Brazilian educational reality, they must take on, in an organized way, the historical challenge of (re) construction of the educational system as a space for the formation of critical consciousness and transformative citizenship. Such insertion cannot take place in isolation,

but in partnership with other educators of good will, committed to the democratic school - highlighting the figures of the teacher and the school manager. In more specific terms, it is up to the category of psychologists to identify the psychological knowledge and practices considered relevant, so that they can be at the service of this great historical undertaking, which is the struggle for the construction of a democratic, inclusive and good quality school - marking, in short, our way of participating in the process of building a more just, solidary and humane society.

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