

Presentation of the dossier

External evaluation in the context of corporate reform: challenges for social quality

Mara Regina Lemes de Sordi¹
State University of Campinas

Maria Simone Ferraz Pereira²
Federal University of Uberlândia

Regiane Helena Bertagna³
São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”

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Many years have passed since neoliberal policies have sought to appropriate the evaluation of school quality, normalizing vertical forms of control over teaching as a means of promoting greater educational quality. To this end, considerable public time and money have been spent to reflect, through students' results on standardized tests, a true, almost orthodox portrait of how schools and their professionals have failed in their primary duty, which is to ensure that children and youth learn. The idea seems to homogenize that the more evaluation occurs, the higher the produced quality. In this regard, the school, tethered to business logic, becomes qualified by productivity, efficiency, and competence from a mercantile and technocratic perspective.

Defending quality in education involves grappling with assessment-control, acknowledging that it often diverges from socially relevant frameworks. This evaluative trend undermines the nobler and formative purposes of evaluation, reducing them to

¹ Doctorate in Education. Associate Professor at UNICAMP. Coordinator of the Laboratory for Observation and Descriptive Studies (Loed) at the Faculty of Education at Unicamp. Campinas, SP, Brasil. E-mail: maradesordi14@gmail.com; Lattes: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/6737123125852473>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1216-7185>.

² Doctorate in Education. Professor at the Federal University of Uberlândia. This work is associated with the research groups LOED/UFU (leader), LAPGE (vice-leader), and the research funded by FAPEMIG 01/2021 – Universal Demand - Project APQ-01517-21. Uberlândia, MG, Brasil. E-mail: msimonefp@ufu.br; Lattes: <https://lattes.cnpq.br/3381781135088677>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7009-7571>.

³ Doctorate in Education. São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho”. This work is linked to the research groups LOED/UNESP (leader) and GREPPE/UNESP (vice-leader) and the research funded by FAPESP – Process 2022/06861-7 (Cooperation Agreements with SEDUC/Secretary of Education/PROEDUCA – Basic Education Research Program) under her coordination. Rio Claro, SP, Brasil. E-mail: regiane.bertagna@unesp.br; Lattes: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/4538018150038718>; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4415-0978>.

mere compilations of educational metrics that serve meritocratic classifications and the interests of education's commodification rather than recognizing it as a social right. It constitutes a transnational movement that obscures the essential debate regarding quality, its meanings, and implications for future generations. Economic and cultural imperialism continues to impose its standards of educational quality, thereby leading educational policies in various nations, through external evaluations, to internalize and normalize these effects. This, in turn, impacts and restrains locally-driven initiatives more aligned with the human development of new generations, causing them to lose their mobilizing power. Are these remnants of colonialism? An update on new forms of capital domination facilitated by the digital age? These are questions that certainly warrant historical analysis.

Recognizing education as a contested field, researchers are increasingly focused on exposing the limitations and economic interests underlying such policies, while also highlighting movements countering regulations that emerge in the interstices of schools.

Some studies indicate how external evaluation policies rooted in neoliberal principles impact schools, pushing them towards producing a type of quality based on evidence that is tied to quantifiable results from standardized tests. A vertical regulation of quality, aligned with market interests and fostering competition among individuals, schools, education networks, and countries, reinforces an evaluative conception in which comparison, ranking, and meritocracy serve as the driving forces behind achieving educational quality.

Other studies emphasize the need for a vigorous and responsible resurgence among school professionals in defense of a democratic and quality public education that contributes to the pedagogical, political, and social emancipation of students from the working class. These studies rest on the premise that equal access to schools does not always translate to equal opportunities and guaranteed learning, as indicated by the regulatory assessment policies implemented in Brazilian schools over the past 30 years, unless accompanied by a broader and expanded matrix of human formation. Without such commitment, the role of schools will scarcely impact the emancipation of minds and bodies necessary for societal transformation in pursuit of democracy and social justice for all.

In this context, education continues to play a strategic role in the formation of children, youth, and adults. Therefore, it is imperative to defend public education and to distance ourselves from any educational policies and practices that serve capitalist interests, as has been the case in proposed reforms in the educational field during times of radical neoliberal orientations.

Freitas (2018) refers to the resurgence of neoliberalism in education as a business reform, largely financed by significant foundations and corporate funds, which promotes the idea that the quality of public education services can be improved through a reduction in the role of the state; a narrowing of relations with the business world; the transfer of business innovation to education; the integration of technology via learning platforms in schools; the adoption of a managerial perspective in the management of educational institutions; and the encouragement of competition among schools and teachers.

From the author's perspective, the procedures utilized by the policies implemented in the context of business reform - namely, standardization; vertically oriented accountability; and the establishment of goals via standardized testing to demonstrate results - tend to undermine public education with the aim of privatizing it.

According to Ravitch (2011, p. 224),

it is antidemocratic to hand over control of public education policies to private foundations run by the wealthiest individuals in society. When the wealthiest among these foundations unite for a common purpose, they represent a particularly powerful force that exceeds the reach of democratic institutions. These foundations, regardless of how valid and well-intentioned they may be, are not public organizations. They are not subject to public oversight or review, as a public organization would be. (...) Foundations demand that public schools and teachers be held accountable for their performance, yet they themselves are not accountable to anyone.

In the developments, the reform makes the educational processes in peripheral countries attractive to transnational investments from central countries, focusing on economic rationale and the formation of the flexible man, self-entrepreneurial. In this scenario, the role of the school shifts from providing comprehensive knowledge to stimulating the exercise of individual freedom, allowing personal merit to achieve success in school, in the job market, and consequently, in life. Education, in turn, gradually ceases to be conceived as a right and begins to be defended as a service to be acquired within the logic of the free market.

According to Ball (2020, p. 186), “the implementation of market-based educational reforms essentially constitutes a class strategy that has as one of its main effects the reproduction of advantages and disadvantages related to social class (and ethnicity)”. It becomes evident that the advancement of corporate logic in education places public schools and those who most require them at the center of disassembly, as they are viewed as obstacles to the consolidation of the commercialization of education and the

realization of quality education. Freitas (2018, p. 55) warns that “the destruction of the public system occurs gradually through the introduction of the objectives and processes of business organizations within public institutions”.

In this vein, the educational policies implemented over the last 30 years have subjected schools to excessive regulation and control, aimed at ensuring quality. It is within this context that the official perspective presents external evaluation as a political and administrative response to subsidize actions for quality improvement, primarily concerned with demonstrating to the school community and society whether students have learned or not, and also enabling a transparent accountability process to society and improving the discussion among public bodies to address the challenges of education in the country.

According to Dourado, Oliveira e Santos (2007, p. 12),

The concepts of quality that appear in the documents of organizations, despite variations, present some common points, such as the connection of the concept of quality to measurement, performance, and the indication of the need for the establishment of learning assessment programs.

As can be inferred, the historical context that gives rise to the corporate reform in contemporary education is harsh, especially for those social segments that are in greatest need of education. Gradually, these groups are seduced by a market-regulated discourse of quality, which showcases a set of technological, pedagogical, and managerial achievements, all aimed at the success of individuals, provided that this success is attained in an individual and meritocratic manner.

The premises discussed in this context have been examined and problematized for some time, which could suggest the untimeliness of this dossier. However, with the escalation of attacks on public education, the alarming rise of conservative and reactionary forces in society, the platformization of school management, among many other issues, we are reinvigorated in our responsibility to mobilize progressive and critical forces in education. This involves circulating a body of work and reflections that contribute to actions of resistance and counter-regulation.

The dossier titled *External Assessment in the Context of Business Reform: Challenges for Social Quality* gathers works that focus on reflecting the centrality that assessment, within the realm of educational business reform, has gained in public educational policies. This potential serves to clarify the underlying ideas of this logic, revealing the political-historical project that underpins such a perspective, promoting

discussion and the exchange of experiences in defense of public schooling - an essential human right to education - alongside the possibilities for defending and constructing social quality by those who implement policies in schools. It also emphasizes the promotion of collective and participatory evaluative processes, reaffirming and intensifying democratic values and social justice.

We begin the Dossier with an interview with Luiz Carlos de Freitas, conducted by Regiane Helena Bertagna (UNESP/Rio Claro) and Luana Costa Almeida (UFSCar). This interview presents a macro analysis of the global development of capitalism and the influences of this system on public policies, especially through the channels of assessment and educational quality. Beyond the announced theoretical contribution and reflection, the researcher's significant contributions to the field of educational assessment in the country are highlighted.

Two published works are related to external assessment at the higher education level; one of them, authored by Marconi Neves Macedo and Maria Arlete Duarte de Araújo (UFRN), addresses the changes that have occurred in the National Higher Education Assessment System (SINAES) in Brazil and its implications for realizing higher education as a right in light of the advances by the private sector and the concept of education as a commodity. The other work, by Lainesse Benjamim Samussone (ISPM), Suely de Fátima Ramos Silveira, and Nayara Gonçalves Lauriano (UFV), analyzes the underlying interests concerning the implementation of the assessment system for courses and programs at Mozambican Higher Education Institutions (IES) - the SINAQES.

Next, we highlight three articles that broadly analyze the context of corporate reform concerning public educational systems and school management. The first, authored by Marilda de Oliveira Costa, Samára Assunção Valles Jorge, and Elda Vasni Tavares Câmara (UNEMAT), examines the evaluative and accountability policies affecting the state of Mato Grosso. It suggests that corporate education reforms, influenced by neoliberal, neotechnocratic, and authoritarian principles, constitute strong "normative and institutional shackles that immobilize collective subjects and hinder democratic and progressive actions and proposals, thus countering the ongoing hegemonic project of capital in education".

The second article in this block, written by Viviane Ferreira and Givanildo da Silva (UFAL), analyzes the educational policies developed through state reform in the 1990s, focusing on the pedagogical and political dimensions of the culture of assessment that reshapes practices, curricula, and training within the public school context. It

emphasizes a reflection on the Educational Bonus Policy by examining the Educational Performance Bonus, established in 2008 in the state of Pernambuco.

The third article, authored by Jaqueline Vidigal and Maria Simone Ferraz Pereira (UFU), reflects on how the Integrated Management Program of the School (GIDE) and the Minas Gerais System of Evaluation and Equity in Public Education (SIMAVE) highlight mechanisms of the corporate education reform, such as standardization, an emphasis on results through assessment, and managerialism in public education in Minas Gerais, particularly during the first administration (2019-2022) of the New Party (Novo).

In another set of articles, we highlight experiences aimed at analyzing the repercussions of external assessments in schools, whether national or international. We begin with the article by Karla de Oliveira Santos (UNEAL), which seeks to understand the impacts of Prova Brasil in a public school in the municipality of São Miguel dos Campos, in the state of Alagoas, arguing that it represents a “tactic of neoliberal governance that produces knowledge and discourses that subjugate the educational community to achieve educational indicators and successful performances [...] based on performance statistics, competitiveness, and rankings”.

The article presented by Gladys Rocha (UFMG), Mariza Schneider (Municipal Network of Sabará), and Raquel Martins (UFLavras) discusses teachers’ perceptions regarding the use of results from literacy assessments in two public schools within the municipal network of Sabará/MG, which have high proficiency levels and distinct socioeconomic backgrounds. It reveals pressures and frustrations concerning the results obtained, as well as difficulties in understanding the assessment instruments and the information provided about the outcomes.

The article by Rosilda de Menezes (Unopar), Tânia Gisela Biberg-Salum (Uniderp), and Helenara Regina Sampaio Figueiredo (Unopar) analyzes the Political Pedagogical Project (PPP) of a public state school in Paraná, focusing on evaluative practices and instruments, as well as interdisciplinary connections among curricular components in the context of the final years of Elementary Education (EF). It reveals that teachers find themselves caught between two discourses: “the explicit one in guiding documents, and the other, implicit in external evaluations that restrict teachers’ autonomy”.

Also within this grouping, two other articles emerged with a critical yet propositional perspective regarding the analysis and confrontation of the realities faced by schools. The first, authored by Claudia Pereira de Pádua Sabia (UNESP/Marília), Thaís Carvalho Zanchetta Penteadó, and Margarida Montejano da Silva (Municipal Education Secretariat of Campinas/SP), examines the objective conditions of operation

in the implementation process of Participatory Institutional Evaluation (AIP) in the public schools of the northwestern region of Campinas/SP. This study highlights the necessity for reforms and infrastructure improvements, as well as the hiring of education professionals to meet the demands of the school community, aiming for enhancements in the social quality provided to students. It suggests, in a propositional manner, that AIP serves as a strategic forum to enable the social quality of public schools.

We conclude this section with an article written by Mara Regina Lemes de Sordi (UNICAMP) and Estela Costa (University of Lisbon), which analyzes alternative experiences in evaluating the quality of public schools, developed in two different contexts (Portugal and Brazil/Campinas/SP). These experiences present proposals for “soft regulation models” and proactively reaffirm “the schools’ ownership over social quality and self-assessment for dialogue with the entities responsible for external regulation”.

We hope that by bringing together a diverse group of researchers from various regions, states, and national and international institutions, we can contribute to reflections and debates on the business logic in education. These researchers, with a keen, critical, and proactive perspective, have engaged with different realities and contexts to elucidate the nuances of this logic, employing evaluation and quality of education as a strategic pathway. Our aim is to advocate for an education committed to human development and social quality, while producing alternatives to the framework imposed by educational policies derived from the business reform of education.

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