



Policies for educational evaluation of continuing education of teachers

*Políticas de avaliação educacional e formação
continuada de professores*

*Las políticas de evaluación educativa y la formación
continua de los docentes*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to contribute to the analysis of the policies for continuing education of teachers that work in the first years of elementary school, focusing on its relation to the

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suggestive character of the policies of evaluation. This study took place in Dourados (MS), where there were interviews with directors of five schools in the municipal education system, as well as municipal directors responsible for the implementation of policies for continuing education for teachers in order to identify their impressions of the policies of continuing education developed by the municipal education system. The directors' opinions indicate a strengthening of the relationship between continuing study and evaluation, which proposes to direct the policies that assure material and financial resources, but at the same time establish mechanisms for assessing the application of these resources. Thus, the conclusion is that continuing education has been planned to work on students' results.

Keywords: Policy and evaluation of education. Continuing education. Teacher education.

Resumo

Este texto visa contribuir para a análise da política de formação continuada de professores alfabetizadores dos anos iniciais do Ensino Fundamental, buscando apontar sua relação com o caráter indutor das políticas de avaliação. Toma-se como lócus o município de Dourados (MS), onde foram realizadas entrevistas com gestores de cinco escolas públicas da rede municipal de ensino, bem como com gestores municipais responsáveis pela implementação de políticas de formação continuada de professores, no intuito de identificar suas impressões acerca da política de formação continuada desenvolvida pela rede municipal de ensino. As considerações feitas pelos gestores indicam um fortalecimento da relação formação/avaliação, que propõe um direcionamento de políticas que assegurem recursos materiais e financeiros, mas que, ao mesmo tempo, estabelecem mecanismo de aferição da aplicação desses recursos. Sendo assim, conclui-se que as ações de formação continuada vêm sendo direcionadas para a mediação dos resultados a partir do desempenho dos alunos.

Palavras-chave: Política e avaliação educacional. Formação continuada. Formação de professores.

Resumen

Este texto tiene como objetivo contribuir al análisis de la formación continua de los profesores de alfabetización en los primeros años de la escuela primaria, buscando apuntar su relación con el carácter inductor de políticas de evaluación. Se toma como el locus del municipio

Dourados, MS, en el que se llevaron a cabo entrevistas con los administradores de las cinco escuelas públicas en el sistema escolar municipal, así como un gerente municipal responsable de la implementación de políticas de formación continua para los docentes, con el fin de identificar sus impresiones sobre la política de formación continua desarrollada por las escuelas municipales. Las consideraciones hechas por los administradores indican un fortalecimiento de la formación relación/evaluación, proponiendo una dirección política para asegurar los recursos materiales y financieros, pero al mismo tiempo, establecer un mecanismo medición de la aplicación de estos recursos. Así, se concluye que las iniciativas formación continua se han dirigido a la mediación de los resultados de rendimiento de los estudiantes.

Palabras Clave: *Evaluación política y educativa. Formación continua. Formación del profesorado.*

Introduction

Evaluation is one of the structuring elements for the implementation of current education policies. It is a strategy that allows the achievement of goals to improve the quality of education, and is considered a form of “pedagogical efficiency” (LIBÂNEO; OLIVEIRA; TOSCHI, 2007), which is disseminated through the pedagogy of competition, efficiency, and results. In this context, evaluation assumes “more qualifying and less training-diagnostic purposes”, thus encouraging competition and improving performance through symbolic and economic stimuli (OLIVEIRA, J., 2009, p. 242).

This perspective also involves maintaining the “centrality of the evaluation” (FREITAS, H., 2003, p. 1112), which reinforces misconceptions about the causes leading to low approval ratings of pupils in national examinations, “[...] blaming — once again — teachers exclusively for the success and/or failure of basic education students’ performance”.

In keeping with this notion, education teachers are an essential element of the government’s agenda in terms of the effectiveness of

educational measures, which consists of flexible tools for better education management (MAUÉS, 2009). This interest directly correlates with the fact that, usually, these professionals have to deal with problems and solutions related to the process of school teaching and learning.

Therefore, UNESCO's Education for All Global Monitoring Report (GMR) ensures that educational systems can improve the quality of public education, among other factors, by investing in teaching staff since "developing their potential is crucial to improving the quality of learning". Moreover, "[...] the quality of education improves when teachers are supported, and worsens when they are not" (BOKOVA, 2014, p. 4). This indicates that "low quality teaching undermines learning, even of those pupils that attend school." Furthermore, "one third of the children who have reached primary school age are not learning the basics, whether at school or not" (BOKOVA, 2014, p. 3).

Findings such as these led to the formation of a movement in several countries, including Brazil, to recognize the importance of having access to reading and writing practices, which are the basis of the literacy process. Aside from recognizing the problematic nature of working classes joining formal education, although literate, the vast majority have not acquired the reading and writings skills necessary for effective and proficient participation in social and professional practices involving written language.

Literacy, especially that offered by schools during the initial phases of a child's education, involves the teaching and learning of reading and writing processes in their mother tongue, which then becomes a complex process involving only human actions (i.e., policies related to the duties of the state and the constitutional rights of its citizens) (MORTATTI, 2010). Although this approach does not necessarily rely on the pedagogical mediations provided by educational institutions, in this study the term literacy specifically refers to a systematic process of reading and writing in Portuguese that involves Brazilian children during their first three years of primary school.

In this process of joining the literate world, the improvement of education teachers stands out as a fundamental condition — specifically the continued education of literacy teachers already working at schools,

as mentioned in UNESCO's GMR (ROSE, 2014). According to Soares (2010), to meet contemporary global demands, it is necessary to go beyond the acquisition of encoding and decoding skills, and use reading and writing in everyday life. Therefore, the teacher is perceived as one of the essential elements of motivation in this process.

Given the above, it is clear that continuing education is a central issue in educational policies. The actions proposed by the education departments of each municipality and the existing education in each school allow teachers to review their practices, adapt to the pedagogical conditions necessary for everyday school life, gain new knowledge, explore new ways of working, and develop new outlooks related to teaching activities.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the analysis of literacy teachers' continuing education policies during the initial years of elementary school, while also seeking to identify their relationship to evaluation policies. The locus of the study was the city of Dourados (MS)¹, where interviews were conducted with five directors of public schools belonging to the municipal teaching network, as well as a municipal manager responsible for the implementation of continuing education policies for teachers. The purpose of these interviews was to gather their opinions concerning continuing education policies developed by public schools.

Continued education teachers and the state-evaluator

Education politics devised by the Brazilian state in the 1990s were consolidated through the establishment of a state-regulator

¹ Dourados is a municipality with the second largest population in the state of Mato Grosso do Sul, with a population of approximately 200,000. Located 120 km from the Paraguay border and 220 km from the state capital (Campo Grande), it has a total area of 4,096.90 km, of which 40.68 km² is urbanized (IBGE, 2010). It is considered an economic hub for Mato Grosso do Sul due to its agricultural production, livestock, industry, trade, and infrastructure and services. The city has the second highest PIB among state municipalities, representing approximately 8% of the total wealth produced; its PIB is 158th among all Brazilian municipalities, and 69th among countryside municipalities.

(AFONSO, 2005), or state-evaluator (FREITAS, D., 2007). In this model, the state assumes a limited role in the execution of social policies, focusing instead on controlling results by means of evaluation. Therefore, the federal government defines national education goals and establishes an external evaluation system (SAEB) to assess the performance (IDEB) of educational institutions. This involves a system of symbolic or economic incentives (scholarships) and even sanctions (rankings or ratings) designed to encourage the realization or improvement of “contracts” or “compromises” between the state and education (CAMINI, 2010) through cooperation with federal entities.

In this context education has a central place, wherein the state plays a different role and functions more as a regulator and evaluator than an executor. Ball (2004) calls this a “coordinated government”, wherein teaching competences (also known as learning policies) become a central and integrating principle. Therefore, education policies strongly focus on the teacher, who is a privileged actor in the educational process.

According to Scheibe (2010, p. 987), “the teacher should be an agent of change responsible for the implementation of twenty-first century concepts”. Moreover, Maués (2009) notes that the education of professionals is presently a constant focus in different countries, and is reflected in their policies. This facilitates the realization of the intended goals in relation to schools’ newfound roles, which are based on regulations triggered by the process of globalization, or by what Ball (2004) has termed “glocalization”, which entails the adaptation of global trends to local histories.

In this context, competition between countries for a place in the global market causes governments to be increasingly concerned with the results of their education systems (BROOKE, 2006). In parallel, an influx of educational resources has prompted investigations into the effectiveness of this sector’s investments, necessitating more detailed assessments of the quality of the education offered.

This demand for greater information related to the performance of educational systems was satisfied with the implementation of accountability policies, by which such information was rendered public

by schools, directors, and other school staff members responsible for the level of performance achieved by an institution. Therefore, the conviction and promptness by which accountability was adopted as core a public school management policy is undeniable (BROOKE, 2006).

Brooke (2006) indicates that four basic ingredients comprise the accountability systems recently deployed in several countries, which are somewhat similar in the Brazilian political context. Authority is the first ingredient, and it entails the decision of the authorities (MEC/INEP) to make school performance statistics public. The second ingredient concerns information — namely the use of standardized tests or procedures to compile the aforementioned statistics. The third ingredient deals with the standards and criteria used to analyze statistics, and how to identify schools that exhibit exceptional performance (known as OECD standards in developed countries). The fourth and final ingredient addresses the application of incentives or sanctions according to established standards and their consequences.

These processes are more clearly consolidated in advanced capitalist countries such as United States, where a series of business school reforms were carried out (FERNANDES; SCAFF; OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 337). This, in turn, revealed “a perverse sense of autonomy in terms of accountability” wherein directors are responsible for a school’s success, teachers for student performance, the community for school maintenance, and the state for control of this process, which includes the penalization of those who fail to comply (FERNANDES; SCAFF; OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 338).

Here the authors would like to highlight a strategy embraced by Brazil’s Education for All Movement, which is similar to many North American reform efforts wherein commitments made by entrepreneurs were adopted as national policies — in this case by the Brazilian Government in the form of the Education Development Plan (EDP) (FERNANDES; SCAFF; OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 338).

EDP is the first major government initiative to implement regulatory procedures, as it establishes a political mechanism to appraise

governance between federal entities, as well as between institutions in civil society that call for increased “[...] accountability and the mobilization of all public officials involved in ‘education’” (OLIVEIRA, D., 2011, p. 328).

Regarding EDP, the Articulated Actions Plan (AAP) is a federal government initiative that encourages states and municipalities to participate in the “Commitment Education for All” program, which provides financial support to educational projects. For MEC, the plan is intended to subsidize necessary improvements in educational quality while also raising the IDEB (AMORIM; SCAFF, 2010, p. 50). The authors would like to point out that AAP establishes conditions for planning in the form of a regulated state instrument, over which the federal government exerts regulatory powers by providing technical assistance and financial support. This aid is also provided locally for the implementation of policies and evaluation instruments (AMORIM; SCAFF, 2010, p. 52).

Therefore, regulation of the Brazilian educational system includes accountability initiatives that primarily support decentralization, resulting in the evaluation and centralization of education-related decisions by means of curricula and certification reforms, which directly involve teacher education and encourage training based on market logic. This results in the mercantilization of subordinating relationships in the form of accountability effects, which are supported by performativity (BALL, 2004).

According to Ball (2004), performativity plays a crucial role in this political process, and functions in a variety of ways in order to connect various elements and reform them. Moreover, it facilitates state monitoring and follow-up, “which governs from a distance.” This allows the state to penetrate the cultures, practices, and subjectivities of its public institutions and employees without explicitly doing so. Performativity alters meanings and what the state has labeled “multiple regulations” (MAUÉS, 2009), while also producing new guidelines to ensure cohesion among the actions carried out by different federal entities. These actions tend to objectify and commodify the public sector through commercialization by translating the knowledge-based work of educational institutions into quantitative statistics.

The rhetoric concerning accountability, improvement, quality, and efficiency that accompanies these objectifications “renders existing practices fragile and indefensible [thus making] change inevitable and irresistible, particularly when incentives are related to ‘performance measures’” (BALL, 2004, p. 1116). Consequently, teaching and learning are restricted to production and supply processes that must comply with the goals of quality control and an efficient transfer market.

This objectification contributes to the notion that social services such as education are forms of production, and thus similar to other types of services and products.

Performativity in the continuing education of literacy teachers in the municipality of Dourados (MS)

Ball’s study is highly influential in discussions concerning performativity in teacher training, especially in continuing education. This study examines interviews conducted with school and education managers involved in the implementation of the National Pact for Literacy at the Right Age (NPAIC), which was established by Ordinance No. 867 (BRASIL, 2012), on July 4th, 2012. The aim of this ordinance was to increase commitment to the ideas presented in Decree No. 6,094 (BRASIL, 2007), which mandated the teaching of reading and writing to children of up to eight years old prior to completing their third year of primary school, while also assessing the results by means of periodic exams that would include:

- I - proficiency in Portuguese and mathematics;
- II - the implementation of universal annual assessments of pupils in their third year of primary school by the National Institute of Studies and Educational Research (INEP);
- III - the presence of state management to support the pact’s final implementation in all municipalities (BRASIL, 2012, p. 1).

Furthermore, Article 6 of the pact sets the following goals: 1) continued education of literacy teachers; 2) the provision of learning materials, literature, and educational technologies; 3) evaluation; and 4) management, control, and social mobilization (BRASIL, 2012, p. 3). These goals were established to set future educational standards by the federal government in all Brazilian schools, which would be assessed based on evaluations.

Recently MEC published Ordinance No.482 (BRASIL, 2013), on July 7th, 2013, in the Official Diary of the Union, thus establishing the National Assessment of Literacy (NAL). The NAL is designed to evaluate children at the end of their third primary school year (i.e., at the end of their literacy cycle) in public schools countrywide. An exam to assess the quality, equity, and efficiency of children's literacy had been planned since the NPAIC's establishment as a joint effort between municipalities, states, the federal government, and unions to teach reading and writing to all pupils up to eight years of age.

According to the ordinance, NAL will be an annual, large-scale census external to the public school system. The assessment will collect and systematize data, as well as establish indexes for literacy level and the literacy of students during the elementary school literacy cycle. Additionally, this data should reveal information regarding each school's environment, with a focus on teaching and learning. Each school will also receive an overall score, in accordance with the IDEB.

In this sense, a progressive restructuring of educational policy based on large-scale assessment occurs, which aims to ensure that the quality of goals in public education is monitored, especially since educational funding is proportionate to evaluation results. Generally, these assessments aim to measure the quality of education to ensure the qualifications of teachers and others who working public education (FREITAS, D., 2011).

In a literacy context, the policies outlined above highlight a concern for performance results, being that these correlate with the continuing education of literacy teachers. However, accountability in

the process of developing reading materials, activities, and proposals, while also ensuring improved performance and deadline compliance, generates gaps in education. This fact is highlighted in the excerpt below from an interview conducted with a coordinator at a school in the Dourados (MS) municipality:

[...] with accountability and activities that should be applied in the classroom, the teacher does not know where it goes; there are many changes and the teacher remains in a wheel of accountabilities. What then happens is that the teacher takes advantage of his experiences based on what he believes to be best (Interview, Coordinator 1).

Relationships previously prescribed and established through program planning and continuing education projects, mainly in the literacy field, are highlighted by Coordinator 2 who notes that, “[...] *closed boxes that come as something imposed go from the top to the bottom, and the school has to accept them as something connected to SEMED actions*”. Frey (2000) points out that in speeches or vertical proposals “top down” is a part of institutional reality characterized by increasingly diverse and complex public policies. Regarding this perception of imposition, Coordinator 4 explains how this trend is linked to NPAIC:

[...] the teacher is required to teach as if he is signing a form committing himself to the classroom, and to accept responsibility for any resultant problems. If the teacher depends on an incentive to work the following year, they may claim he has problems and deny him this incentive if he does not participate. In that sense, he is truly under pressure (Interview, Coordinator 4).

Aside from the imposition of requiring his participation in the training and the fulfillment of prescribed activities based on specific goals, Coordinator 1 believes that results based on external evaluations and their impact are a major concern: “*The issue of monitoring results is what worries me, namely the national tests [i.e., Provinha Brasil and Prova Brasil in the fifth year] and now NAL, which attempts to gather results from teachers*”. This

statement causes one to reevaluate Afonso's (2009) assertion that the state-regulator should control the results obtained through systems and educational institutions from an education management perspective.

Coordinator 5 is not concerned with the way evaluations are applied or how teacher training is coordinated; instead, she dislikes being forced to blindly adhere to such requirements. Although she believes that those who devise the evaluations "*are serious people who think about education and want to collaborate*", she also believes that their opinions should be "*heard rather than imposed*". Moreover, she feels that the imposition is veiled, wherein an instructor is asked whether he/she desires to teach the pact and is forced to sign a form stating that he/she does not want to, thereby agreeing that one's students will be evaluated instead.

As for nationwide initiatives, Coordinator 3 notes that while "*pro-literacy and NPAIC provided excellent training, teachers are accustomed to implementing most of the ideas presented, albeit using different terminology. The difference is in accountability for one's results, which is increasing*". Regarding teacher accountability through continuing education, Manager 1 did not perceive any pressure from the federal programs, and believes that training "*is essential for [teachers] to have the best knowledge*". This quote is in agreement with what Kramer (2008) describes as discourse "naturalization" between multiple instances (e.g., intermediate and superior), wherein practices outside the local or school context are considered more profitable and efficient.

Teachers often feel great pressure to improve their performance, especially so that their students will achieve better results in external evaluations (SCHEIBE, 2010). To obtain such results teachers must accept work intensification as something necessary to meet performance expectations, even if in an unconscious manner (BALL, 2004). This has subsequently caused many teachers frustration, as mentioned by Coordinator 1. Indeed, achieving exceptional results in education requires much more than individual will.

Even though the above quotes focus on qualitative dimensions, they do not subtract from the proposal's selective and exclusive features, supported both by quantitative (e.g., income taxes) and qualitative data. The success of the evaluation's execution is dependent on the instruments and procedures used and, above all, whether the undertaken practices are based on universally accepted educational models (ESTEBAN, 2012).

For Ball (2004), performativity and management function in unison to eliminate antiquated professional ethics; in fact, ethical reflection is not necessary to meet goals, improve performance, or maximize budgets. Generally, performativity pushes institutions in the public sector to more strongly embrace private sector values.

The act of teaching, in addition to teacher subjectivity, goes through profound changes under new management modalities (e.g., quality and excellence), and with new forms of control (e.g., ranking and rating). This process leads to two conflicting outcomes: 1) increased individualization, which results in decreased solidarity based on common professional interests; and 2) increased membership in organized groups (i.e., unions), as a means to oppose new forms of corporate-based institutional and community affiliations. This requires a reevaluation of the relationship between individual commitment and organizational action (BALL, 2004).

The Manager 1 of SEMED considers continuing education an aid, but not in relation to accountability since, *"if the teacher does not understand the depth of all this, how will he work in the classroom? He will not know how to teach in a manner that will enable the child to master the necessary linguistic specificities"*. He further notes that although there are goals to be met, there is no policy for accountability established in the evaluation:

I do not see an accountability policy for teachers, but rather a direction. For example, NPAIC was created so that teachers would establish reasoning in their work in order to teach reading and writing. Whether dealing with Portuguese or mathematics, if the instructor does understand how to teach

these subjects to children it will be reflected in the performance of his or her pupils. The IDEB will not correspond with the expectations of a national proposal; I consider this policy a joint effort (Interview, Manager 1).

The Manager asserts that NPAIC enables teachers to pursue a proper direction based on the program's goals, which include teaching reading and writing to children who are up to eight years old. Moreover, he states that although teachers have received incentives and training, the index remains low, necessitating review and reassessment in order to verify whether a particular instructor is experiencing difficulties. According to Esteban (2012), learning and knowledge can be translated into skills and indicators that are fragmented, quantifiable, and distant from the relationship that each subject effectively establishes within the written culture. This "new" subject returns to the classroom as an accurate representation of each student based on their exam results—an approach that is overly simple and of questionable benefit. However, the SEMED representative quoted below does not believe that performance pressure is an issue:

Look, there is a pattern to follow, and we will work with these teachers in continuing education in order to understand how to achieve an expected standard of performance, which will subsequently allow for continuous evaluations. Since the training is continuous, assessment will also be continuous so that we might determine what issue straining should address (Interview, Manager 1).

Continuing education plays a very important role as both an axis for articulated school intervention and as a mechanism for the dissemination of established goals. In keeping with this notion, the SEMED manager repeatedly reinforces the importance of training practices based on performance evaluations. In fact, he indicates that in an ideal configuration a supervisor could follow each teacher's lessons and planning perpetually, thus allowing the supervisor to

see what was planned for that study group and possibly intervene after the class was given. Moreover, he asserts that after the lesson he would prefer to sit down with the teacher in order to “determine how the class might have been improved, and highlight the lesson’s strengths (Interview, Manager 1).

These ways of referring to continuing education are not only concepts, but also included in the practices and policies that these principles suggest (NÓVOA, 2008). The “discursive consensus” cited by Nóvoa and adopted by education teachers is closely related to the presence of greater knowledge in the field, as well as educational policies established in past decades. In departments of education, this movement prompted a more focused look at teachers; moreover, training policies have assumed strategic importance in determining the actions taken by education networks, highlighting the central role of educational processes while defining the responsibilities of teachers, directors, pedagogical coordinators, and trainers.

Similarly, it is not acceptable to limit the work of literacy teachers to a linear, well-trodden path, which assumes that the literacy process is restricted to a mere domain of a code.

Final considerations

The stances taken by managers indicate that the training/assessment relationship was reinforced. This was evident in their policies, which were designed to ensure financial and material resources while also establishing a mechanism to assess the application of these resources. Therefore, it is understandable that efforts toward continuing education were intended to mediate the results, starting with the performance of pupils. NPAIC started training literacy teachers in the beginning of 2013, while NAL was applied at the end of the year, with emphasis on the

Portuguese language. In 2014 continuing education placed greater emphasis on mathematics, and an evaluation was also carried out at the end of the year (BRASIL, 2013).

Esteban (2012) believes that to meet the requirements of external evaluations, language can be reduced in order to measure it, resulting in a narrow perception of pedagogical practice. Formulated questions express a mechanistic conception of literacy, with contents and methods that are distant from a significant portion of students' everyday lives, thus exposing the stereotypical knowledge and realities embedded in said questions. Counting the number of correct and incorrect responses is unacceptable, and merely supports the classification of students. By requiring a specific level of proficiency, both schools and teachers can focus on practices that bring them closer to achieving an expected level of performance, although this can negatively affect the teaching-learning relationship.

Therefore, it is possible that the sanctioned implementation of accountability policies, even if symbolic, merely increases teachers' workloads, and contributes to meaningless political discussions concerning the quality of education. As Freitas H. (2007, p. 1223) indicates, "these actions will allow the development of a 'new face' of decentralization management". In that sense, Brazilian educational policies are shifting their focus to the "politics of evaluating basic education, [which] prevents representatives from designing sophisticated training programs for education professionals that address the needs of future generations, and subsequently the construction of a new life and new humanity" (FREITAS, H., p. 1225).

The goal of teaching literacy to all children up to eight years of age strengthens the democratization of the schooling process, and "establishes uniform parameters for learning and development, [while also] defining what is sufficient and ideal" (ESTEBAN, 2012, p. 587). In the author's opinion, standardization cannot eliminate the exclusion processes that prevent the effective democratization of education, considering that

the schools must also address significant social, historical, cultural, and individual differences, which require a complementary relationship between the teaching and learning process.

There is a need for national training and qualification policies that prioritize, in an articulated manner, the goals of continuing education while also working to establish initial training programs, improved working conditions, and better salaries. This should be executed with “the socio-historical concept of the educator as a guide, hence representing the ideals of all educators and the struggles of public education”. Furthermore, “it is important not to create illusions of easy solutions to educational problems and training” (FREITAS, H., 2007, p. 1204). As stated by Nóvoa (2008, p. 233), we should seek to “undo the hopes of those who believe in ‘magic solutions’, as education is a field wherein the consensus is more apparent than reality.”

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