



Education, human rights and social reconstruction in contemporary policies for schooling in Brazil

*Educação, direitos humanos e reconstrução social
nas políticas contemporâneas de escolarização no Brasil*

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Abstract

This paper aims at analysing the shaping of human rights as a key subject to make Brazilian policies for schooling in our time. From a sociological slant about different processes of individualisation in the contemporary society, the writers problematise the role the theme plays in the social agenda, and make a critique of different meanings it has in our time, emphasising on its strategic position towards new ways of managing school policies and processes. Finally, by looking at the renewing of human rights in documents made for basic education, they argue that these rights have been assumed as an important tool for school fairness, while creating

narratives of social reconstruction for a society where uncertainty, flexibility and individualism are naturalised in collective processes of formation and living together.

Keywords: Human rights. Educational policies. Schooling.

Resumo

O presente artigo visa analisar a constituição dos direitos humanos como temática indispensável para a composição das políticas brasileiras de escolarização em nosso tempo. Partindo de uma percepção sociológica acerca dos diferentes processos de individualização na sociedade contemporânea, os autores problematizam o lugar ocupado pela temática na pauta social, assim como estabelecem um diagnóstico crítico dos diferentes sentidos que adquire em nosso tempo, enfocando seu posicionamento estratégico junto às novas formas de gestão das políticas e dos processos escolares. Por fim, mediante a percepção da revitalização dos direitos humanos em documentos produzidos para a educação básica, observa-se que tais direitos têm sido assumidos como importante instrumento de justiça escolar. Ao mesmo tempo, esses direitos engendram narrativas de reconstrução social para uma sociedade onde a incerteza, a flexibilidade e o individualismo passam a ser naturalizados nos processos coletivos de formação e convivência humanas.

Palavras-chave: Direitos humanos. Política educacional. Escolarização.

“Paving the intellectual moral way for a new social order is a sufficiently original and encouraging ideal for spurring a new spirit in the profession of teacher and for guiding radically changed efforts.”
(John Dewey)

Over the past two decades, we have faced strong social concern of the school. Beyond the continuous process of reform of schooling policies in the whole Latin America, there are innumerable entities, organisations or social movements that come to support the urgent need for a renewal of the school. Encouraged by varied concerns and aims, from the economic growth of nations until more skills and opportunities for

individuals, contemporaneousness takes for granted public and private investments in education. By the way, the words 'education for all' had never been so widespread as today.

Concomitant with this movement of widening the school social place, we can visualise the emergence of formative rhetoric, regulatory strategies and of themes to work in school life which is characterised by displacement of conventional school-guided meanings. In Deweyan terms (DEWEY, 1976), we are witnessing a reconstruction of educational background experiences, while education policies are reorganised and include new action lines and investigative agendas (SILVA, 2010). New themes and concerns shape contemporary policies of schooling. Democratic discursiveness or recognition of multiple cultural and identity productions circulate in schools today.

As for ways of life and procedures in a democratic society, one of the key themes for this social and cultural change echoing in the school productions of today is the question of human rights. Rather than taking education as a right, but the chance to consider these rights as objects for students in their formative path in school. The development of a National Education Plan of Human Rights (BRASIL, 2007a), the publication of an issue dedicated to this theme in the pedagogical material of the programme 'Ética e cidadania: construindo valores na escola e na sociedade'¹ (BRASIL, 2007b), and the introduction of the discipline of human rights in the National Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary School (BRASIL, 2012) as a theme to be worked in a cross-sectional and integrated way, are recent signs for this tendency.

The consideration that Human rights are regarded as essential for Brazilian schooling policies in our time is what we will analyse here. Beginning from a sociological perception of different processes of individualisation in contemporary society, we will problematise the role human rights play in education in our country. Our wish is to establish a proper diagnosis of different political meanings themes have in our time, focusing on its strategic positioning towards new ways of running policies and school processes. In the end, to support the pressing urgency

¹ The programme was called "Ethics and citizenship: constructing values in school and society".

to revitalise human rights in basic education, we hold that study of the theme may become a significant tool for school fairness while it mobilises narratives of social reconstruction for a society in which more and more uncertainty, flexibility and individualism are naturalised through collective processes of formation and living together.

Uncertainty, flexibility and new forms of individualism: a sociological diagnosis

Different sociological diagnoses produced in the late 20th century highlighted the perspective that modern social, political and cultural conditions were in a process of displacement. These approaches pointed up the emergence of social times that were marked by instability in different fields of the social life. Depicting a landscape called 'Liquid Modernity', Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman held that we were living in a time marked by the 'liquidness' of collective relationships. He argues that, while surveillance ruled as a discipline tool in a period characterised by Bentham's Panopticon metaphor (the classical industrial modernity image), power relations and subjectivation have new shapes in the contemporary setting. Bauman (2001) suggests that Modernity, in its current stage, is a 'post-panopticon' in so far as techniques of power.

now are flight, cunning, deviation and dodging, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement, with the complicated corollaries of construction and maintenance of order and with the responsibility for the consequences as well as the necessity to pay for the costs (BAUMAN, 2001, p. 18).

Seeking to typify uncertainty of our times and contemporary spaces, Bauman (1998) tries to show three factors of current modernity stage. The first is associated with the 'new world disorder' (BAUMAN, 1998, p. 33), characterised by the centrality of the political and economic power in the hands of a small group of countries,

and by heightening of inequalities in the landscape he called “world periphery”. The second factor is linked to a possible “universal deregulation”; the sociologist depicted it as “the untied liberty given to the capital and finances at the expense of all other liberties” (BAUMAN, 1998, p. 34). The third factor characterising uncertainty typical of our time would be the lack of security in social networks, that is “liquidness” collective institutions, such as family, religious institutions, political organisations and schools, went on.

From the perspective of labour relations, British sociologist Richard Sennett (2001) points out the emergence of a “flexible capitalism” challenging classical forms of the bureaucracy and giving new conditions for workers’ subjectivities: “are wanted to behave more flexibly, to be open for changes in the short term, to perpetually take risks and to become less dependent on rules and formal procedures” (SENNETT, 2001, p. 10). For Sennett, modern flexibility does not allow workers to plan their lives in the long run, once uncertainty and instability in market relations are resignified in subjects’ everyday practices. This way, under the culture of the new capitalism, contemporaneousness allows new forms of individualism to emerge.

Widening the scope of the developed sociological description, French Gilles Lipovetsky (2004, 2009) suggests we are entering a “hypermodern” landscape. Unlike diagnoses characterising this landscape as “post-”, Lipovetsky points that we live in a ‘hypermodernity’, in which we witness a heightening of modernity, through a ‘globalized liberalism, the quasi-general commercialization of lifestyles, the exploitation “to death” of instrumental reason, and rampant individualism’ (LIPOVETSKY, 2004, p. 31). However, the key characteristic the French sociologist depicts refers to destruction of classical forms of individual autonomy, in which it is an absolute or hypermodern individualism (LIPOVETSKY, 2004).

Therefore, hypermodern individualism means weakening collective regulations, dismantling traditional socialising devices, and thus

empowering individuals towards authorities and imposing of the collective they belong to (LIPOVETSKY, 2009, p. 59).

Conferring pertinence to the analytics Lipovetsky (2009) proposed, we can diagnose in hypermodern times the encouragement of “logics of autonomisation”, that could be found in fashion, politics, education or leisure². “So we can define hypermodern individualism as a deinstitutionalised deregulated individualism, in which the individual becomes increasingly strategist, movable, nomad” (LIPOVETSKY, 2009, p. 61).

Under the sociological conditions, in which metaphors concerning the present are liquidness (BAUMAN, 2001), instability (BAUMAN, 1998), flexibility (SENNETT, 2001) or hypermodernisation of the world (LIPOVETSKY, 2004), which senses may we infer from the centrality of human rights in contemporary policies for schooling in Brazil? If logics of autonomisation increase in hypermodern times, which pedagogical rationalities do rule the referred policies? Which cultural conditions do allow consummating human rights as a ‘national guiding principle’ in school curriculums?

Human rights in schooling policies

Constructing a society that is democratic, inclusive and concerned with reducing social and cultural inequalities is recurrent in schooling policies recently implemented in Brazil. In this orbit, some links between education and human rights have been made in the same contexts in which we have observed the decline of regulatory and organisational potentials in the modern school.

Diagnoses made in the previous section about production of an individualistic social formation increase before perceiving the decline of

² By analysing contemporary schooling processes, Silva (2011) found that logics of entrepreneurship and talent management have come to the foreground in educational agendas.

the school institutionality (DUBET, 2004, 2007). The school as a modern social institution was called to account for keeping the social order, or at least accepted certain duties of constructing an integrated cohesive society. Before a set of changes these organisations have went on in our time (TIRAMONTI, 2005), their social objectives became vague. However, it seems that institutionality decline has not been a mark for the ‘end of the school’, nor the exhaustion of expectations this society has historically given it, despite narratives of its crises and ambiguities.

This vagueness in defining its meanings and social projections constitutes a distance from widening its social roles and performances (CAVALIERE, 2002). This widening has brought and shown new aims for schooling, including the reduction of social inequalities, the social protection (CASTEL, 2005) and recovering civilising principles (ELIAS, 2011). However, these functionalities have made in some way the construction of education as a right to become widespread in Brazil. Just think of Anísio Teixeira’s thought tinged particularly in *Educação não é privilégio*³ (1977) or Darcy Ribeiro’s proposal for Integrated Centres of Public Education (CIEPs).

Thus schooling undergoes sensations of crisis or void in its “reason to be”, while new programmes and policies increase and extend social functions and meanings. However, if this was the situation, it would mean no fresh analytics, because when pedagogical meanings fade, spontaneist assistentialist political actions persevere, as history of education tells us in Brazil. What seems to be changing on the agenda of contemporary schooling policies? Beyond pedagogical practices and curricular proposals, the Brazilian State is promoting a new set of policies, which for us aim at ‘reconstructing social meanings’ (DEWEY, 2001) in school policies.

Lourenço Filho (1972, p. 21) has noted that school services answer to social demands “in a plan of wide social meaning”. One of the deepest critiques Teixeira made of conservative schooling standards in the early 20th century in Brazil was the lack of a “common” formation,

³ Its translation could be “Education is no privilege”, rather than “Education is not a privilege” as it has appeared elsewhere.

once this formation would teach the student to “live in an intelligent way, and take responsible part in his/her society” (TEIXEIRA, 1977, p. 13). In these terms, education is reconstructing individuals’ experience through new experiences in a continuous, active and progressive way (DEWEY, 1976), but is based on conditions of its space and social meanings linking education to its time. For Dewey, the reconstruction of social meanings is visible in values shared for life lived together (DEWEY, 1970), values that are made explicit in the detailed conducts of individuals (DEWEY, 2001).

In the Brazilian case, we have noted that new meanings have been built for education, including the emergence of education in human rights, policies of integral education, acts to safeguard natural and cultural heritage or proposals of respect for diversities, and recognition of social and symbolic differences. This reconstruction requires that they be close to different policies organised by state rationalities distributed in multiple scales of production and circulation of contemporary schooling policies. These new themes are becoming apt to reconstruct meanings once they are situated in multiple places of formative effects, either in the administration or formation of managers for public schools, or in the ups and downs for curricular dynamics and school spaces, or even in the making of policies for the national education. It seems to us that education in human rights goes the same way.

As for relations between education and human rights, these dynamics refer more to dimensions in curricular or teaching-learning experiences than their mediation in widened processes of organising policies. For Dewey (2001) this reconstruction happens in individuals’ conduct, whose inherent sociological meaning bears a critique for American 1910s and 1920s lifestyles the philosopher defined as “raw individualism”. We may consider the inclusion of education in human rights into the curriculum and schooling policies in Brazil as homologous to Dewey’s argument of challenge to individualism. The social reconstruction typical of the inclusion of human rights in the formative agenda in these policies lies in its curricular dimension, whose practicability in school life is more evident than in organisational regimes or juridical-normative structures. Following his argument,

we will display some recurrences found in the analysis of recently-published educational documents enabling this statement.

Human rights, justice and cultural recognition

Chiefly in the historic period after political reopening 1988 Constitution, we will check the emergence of policies and practices towards human rights. Human rights show a value dimension typical of democratic life and demands for justice and citizenship in contemporary landscapes. Widening these demands for rights has displayed a set of new, actors, movements and social disputes that in sociological terms explained ambivalence of demands for economic redistribution and cultural recognition (FRASER, 2001). Apart from material unfairness historically denounced by Marxist perspectives, symbolic unfairness was established as agenda in this society now. However, while the way of constructing social relations was changing, it did not reduce inequalities; on the contrary, they were proliferating (DUBET, 2003).

If, as we have seen, human rights have made up value fields through reshaping individual and collective rights consolidated by demands for cultural recognition as an active citizenship motto, then education was made its own key dimension. Pedagogy or education in human rights was finding a way to exist. This kind of education began to be read as a way of mediating projects in human rights in its various facets, including struggle against social inequalities, gender relations, race, generation, ethnic, or sexual questions, or religious way of life. Educating for a society to be more just, inclusive and not prejudiced against anything was the aim of a whole generation of Brazilian educators. Thus, this question concerns pedagogical interests or for an education in human rights (CANDAUI, 2003; ESTEVÃO, 2006; CLAUDE, 2005).

However, when we decentre this perspective for schooling processes in our time we have to understand that some social practices deepen inequality relations, not shaping an agenda of redefinitions of

institutional devices, nor are able to review education in a biased social fabric (CANDAU, 2003). The debate is embodied when we discuss tensions that are essential to schooling processes: unsuitability between equal opportunities (chiefly of access) in school and inequality of its merits; which updates and gives centrality to new shapes of school fairness⁴

The merit seems to be an incontrovertible element to measure school results because

A priori every child entering school should have an equal opportunity to have success, no matter the condition of his birth. The school should construct a fair competition so that everyone may get the place s/he deserves for a just social order (DUBET, 2008, p. 383)

The French sociologist problematizes the ways in which the principles of justice work in school, including the viability or not of this concept in these situations. And, if school is a site of cultural differences, as dynamics of its time, it is worth challenging this linearity or homogeneity of equality of opportunities. We know that this model of school justice grants moral legitimacy to school inequalities (DUBET, 2005, 2008), which come from it, and under this logic anyone can restrict to his/her own performance and his-/herself.

For Silva (2001) a school of equality would not be credible because even if gratuitous education assured equality of access, families' cultural capital, strategies, parents' ambitions concerning education, life trajectories, and biographies would be different. It seems to us that the more we heighten equality of access, more inequality lay on these propositions. Inequality of school opportunities are in a way derive from social and cultural inequalities out of school which does not exempt the school from producing its own mechanisms. And this is a key contradiction in school making:

⁴ For further discussion of principles of justice with the emergence of education in human rights, see Estevão (2001, 2006), or from another perspective, Gonzáles (2007).

The more the school is encouraged by the principle of equality of opportunity, the more it states that individuals are free and equal, and the more it falls into the contradiction, because it should classify all students according to fundamental equality and dignity (DUBET, 2008, p. 390).

Under this perspective, there are political interests and institutional mechanisms keeping the school under this principle of justice, which hinders effective democratic practices and interrelations in cultural differences in school. Thus

Behind every school debate, we note more tangible interests as we should not forget that particular groups 'win' while others 'lose', and the whole organisation of the game could distribute its gains and losses in a different way (DUBET, 2008, p. 391).

Recent normative documents that were made for Brazilian schooling policies assert the pertinence of this consideration and aim at "restructuring" a field of values for school practices. The National Education Plan of Human Rights (BRASIL, 2007a), is typical of this aim.

This text is based on a set of national and international documents affirming pertinence of these rights, chiefly in the Latin American context in which countries suffered strong repression and violence (SIKKINK, 2006), and aims at bridging gaps between juridical boundaries and social practices. For this it takes a comprehensive definition of human rights

taken as rights for all human beings, regardless of race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, social class, culture, religion, sexual option, political option, or any other form of discrimination. They are rights that are due to human dignity, including rights to live with quality, to health, education, to dwell, leisure, healthy environment, basic sanitation, security, work, and cultural diversity, among others (BRASIL, 2007a, p. 10).

Underlying this definition of human rights, a definition of active citizenship requires that subjects' training observe rights and duties, but searching a model of society articulating rights, solidarity and social

responsibility (JELIN, 2006). In this direction, as Anísio Teixeira, has written, education becomes the “right of rights”. Principles of this education in human rights would be for

- enhancing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms of the human beings;
- developing the human personality and sense of dignity;
- exercising tolerance, respect for diversity in gender and culture, friendship between all nations, indigenous peoples, and racial, ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; and
- enabling everyone to participate in a free society (BRASIL, 2007a, p. 11).

The National Education Plan of Human Rights as a tool for public policy aims at strengthening the democratic state in which human rights are a strategy for national development. This instrument is targeted at basic, higher, non-formal, professional education, and in relations between education and media. From the juridical and normative viewpoint it is associated with the Federal Constitution, Law of Education Bases and Guidelines, Child and Adolescent Statute, Elderly Statute, and a recent code, the Curricular Guidelines for High School (2012).

Social justice and cultural recognition emerge as central themes in these documents. These discussions are reified in principles converging to acts for political pedagogic projects for schools. In terms of operation, recognising differences and cultural manifestations leads to initiatives to reduce and challenge Brazilian social and cultural inequalities.

Human rights, curriculum and democratic living together

At the same time, by introducing its conditions of intervention the National Education Plan of Human Rights states that this practice — education in human rights — may be encouraged by three distinct complementary dimensions: knowledge and skills; values, attitudes and behaviours;

and actions. From this we can infer that these dimensions are supposed to act on knowledge, values and practices are put into action in teaching institutions to consolidate public spaces for democratic living together. Inasmuch as it seeks to work in these dimensions, education in human rights gains conspicuously curricular formative perspective. In the same document, when it introduces guiding principles for basic education, it asserts that education in human rights cuts across different regulating scopes of the school life, and possibly 'pervades the curriculum, initial and continuous training of education providers, the political and pedagogical project of the school, pedagogical sources, the management model, and evaluation' (BRASIL, 2007a, p. 32). In other words, it outlines the shaping of curricular models focused on democratic living together, through education in human rights.

This tendency is reified in other political texts produced in last decade, chiefly when they emphasise the role of education in human rights in public policies against poverty and social inequality. This education configuration was meant to be a strategy for social inclusion, working in a logic of social protection (CASTEL, 2005). The articulation between social protection and democratic living together found in the political trend depicted here is reified in one of the programmatic actions in the referred National Plan.

9. encouraging the inclusion of themes concerning gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disabled people, and all forms of discrimination and violation of rights, in the school curriculum, assuring continuous training for education workers to deal in a critical way with these themes (BRASIL, 2007a, p. 33).

The form of inclusion designed for school curriculums, as we have depicted, positions itself for public policies and practices of living together and democratic participation in school and society (BRASIL, 2007a). Another site where one can find this logic is the issue dedicated to this theme in the pedagogical material of the programme "Ética e cidadania: construindo valores na escola e na sociedade" (BRASIL, 2007b). One of the chapters for this publishing provides experiences of the web

portal “Pró-menino” (Telefonica’s initiative), chiefly the project “Cidade dos Direitos”, a ludic graphic version for the Child and Adolescent Statute (Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente – ECA).

Using the project “Cidade dos Direitos”, the pedagogical material was designed to encourage school practices, performed in an integrated way, to deal with the question of human rights. From the curricular perspective, the text suggests that learning these socially relevant themes depends upon the articulation of school disciplines where it should be possible to “create a cross-sectional movement to enrich the school curriculum, making these projects more significant for students” (BRASIL, 2007b, p. 27). We can find a tendency to position this aspect into the scope of collective respect for particular values, putting the democratic living together under a moral regime.

Towards this, by announcing education in human rights as a national guiding principle, the Curricular Guidelines for High School (BRASIL, 2012) postulate that political pedagogic projects at teaching institutions should foreground the “ethical behaviour as a basis for recognising human and citizenship rights, and to exercise a contemporary humanism expressed in recognition, respect and acceptance of the other’s identity and in naturalisation of solidarity” (Art. 15). Terms like ethical behaviour, moral or behaviourist dimensions may be understood as reducing democratic education’s political meanings in a Deweyan reading of democracy. If education in human rights can struggle against continuous processes of individualisation that are typical of the contemporary social life, which we defend, we should work in the curriculum with human rights’ notions shaping these processes as historical and political constructions (CANDAU, 2003, 2006), as sites for challenge and political dispute (RAMOS, 2011), or as effective mechanisms for social reconstruction (DEWEY, 2001).

Through democratic living together, curricular production of human rights in the basic education is an important political strategy for renewing educational institutions as they are read in “a critical empowering horizon” (CANDAU, 2006, p. 222); or going beyond idealist stance and, for Dewey, enabling “transferring the wanted ideal for a detailed

conduct of the school in the level of management, instruction and materials” (DEWEY, 2001, p. 192). Still according to the American philosopher, this task is essential, especially to “pave the intellectual moral way for a new social order” (DEWEY, 2001, p. 193), as we provided in the quotation at the beginning of this text.

Human rights and social reconstruction: a pedagogical agenda

To close the proposed analytics, it is worth noting that this paper has aimed at viewing critically the shape of human rights as a theme that is essential to the composition of Brazilian schooling policies of our time. We began with a sociological perception of different processes of individualisation in contemporary society to provide a scope of problematisations concerning the place the theme occupies in the social agenda. Moreover, we have sought to make a critical diagnosis for different meanings it has in our time, stressing on its strategic position towards new ways of running policies and school processes.

By adopting a Dewey-based pedagogical reading to observe the renewing of human rights in documents for basic education, we have found that these rights have been taken as an important instrument for school justice while they create social reconstruction narratives for a society where uncertainty, flexibility and individualism are naturalised in collective processes of formation and living together. We believe that this process of social reconstruction becomes politically and pedagogically powerful in contemporary schooling, in so far as its ideal is transferred to the *detailed conduct* of schools, as Dewey (2001) suggests.

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