



## **Ensuring the right to education under performance logic: a study carried out at a Readers' School**

*Garantir o direito à educação sob a lógica performática:  
um estudo na Escola de Leitores*

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses the guarantee of the right to education under the performative logic due to changes that occur in the public sector in different countries. This discussion will be conducted based on data collected the doctoral research, which analyzed the educational policy of the Rio de Janeiro (2009-2012) observing the role of the educational coordinator on implementing the referring policy at the school. The question is: which side adjustments were made by the coordinator to "implement" the educational proposal which is supported by the performative logic towards the defense of the right to education? I seek to answer it under pinned by the concept of

performativity and new managerialism developed by Stephen Ball. The data presented will show that the teachers of the school have made some adjustments in the policy proposed by Secretary of Municipal Education (SME), as a means of ensuring students' right to education. One of the changes observed concerns proposals for competitions so that children could comply with school rules. Another adjustment was perceived in regards to the category *assessment* which, due to pressure from the school to have to reach a goal set by SME, influenced the practice of coordinating that went on to discuss the goals and results of the school in relation to the network, bringing graphics performance of students in every class councils. At the same time, however, the coordinator was developing collective work projects in order to foster reading and writing skills, which became a strategy to confront the culture of *performativity*.

**Keywords:** Performativity. Pedagogical coordination. Right to education.

### **Resumo**

*Este artigo pretende discutir a garantia do direito à educação sob a lógica performática devido às transformações no setor público que ocorrem em diferentes países, inclusive no Brasil. Para tal discussão, parto dos dados coletados na pesquisa de doutorado da autora, que analisou a política educativa da cidade do Rio de Janeiro (2009-2012), observando o papel da coordenadora pedagógica na “implementação” dessa política na escola. A questão da pesquisa é: quais foram os ajustamentos secundários realizados pela coordenadora junto com as professoras ao “implementar” a proposta educativa baseada na lógica performática, considerando sempre a defesa da educação como um direito? Busco respondê-la baseando no conceito de performatividade e novo gerencialismo desenvolvidos por Stephen Ball. Os dados apresentados evidenciam que os educadores da escola fizeram alguns ajustamentos na proposta da Secretaria Municipal Educação (SME), buscando assegurar o direito à educação dos alunos. Uma das modificações observadas se refere às competições propostas para que as crianças pudessem cumprir com as regras da escola. Outro ajustamento foi percebido em relação à categoria avaliação, que devido à pressão de a escola ter que alcançar uma meta estabelecida pela SME, influenciou a prática da coordenadora que passou a discutir as metas e os resultados da escola em relação à rede, trazendo gráficos de desempenho dos alunos em todos os Conselhos de Classe. Ao mesmo tempo, porém, a coordenadora*

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*e as professoras desenvolviam um trabalho coletivo em torno dos projetos de leitura e escrita, que se tornou uma estratégia para enfrentar a cultura da performatividade.*

**Palavras-chave:** *Performatividade. Coordenação pedagógica. Direito à educação.*

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## Introduction

This article discusses ensuring the right to education under performance logic due to transformations in the public sector which have taken place in various countries, including Brazil. These reforms have been “implemented”<sup>1</sup> from two technologies: *new managerialism* and *performativity*. According to Ball (2003), new managerialism refers to changes in the State’s role and the culture of public services. It is “a new form of power, [...] an instrument to create a competitive business culture” (BALL, 2003, p. 544). With regards to performativity, the author suggests that this facilitates the State’s monitoring process for work in public institutions, mainly because it involves a combination of decentralising management, accountability for results obtained through standardised assessments and incentives and awards linked to performance measures.

For this discussion I set off with data collected for doctoral research<sup>2</sup> (LEITE, 2012), which analysed the new educational policy in Rio de Janeiro (2009-2012), while observing the pedagogical coordinator’s role in “implementing” this policy at the school. I seek to answer the following question in this article: Which secondary adjustments were made by the

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<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Mainardes and Marcondes (2009), Ball draws attention to using the term “implementation” which suggests a linear process through which policies move towards a direct form of practice. I use this term due to the lack of another appropriate option but I approach the policy as it is interpreted/translated in the context of the subjects’ practice in this article.

<sup>2</sup> The research was carried out under professor Maria Inês Marcondes’ supervision.

coordinator and teachers, to “implement” the educational proposal which is based on performance logic, while always defending education as a right?

It should be emphasised that rights in a universal sense have been discussed since the French Revolution; but the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was only created following World War II. According to Fischmann (2009), this document represented the first moment in the history of humanity in which various countries sought to determine what they considered as conceivably universal.

Among the rights put forward in this declaration, I highlight the right to education which is associated to recognising conditions which are essential for constructing a fairer and more egalitarian society.

For Gentili (2007, p. 1072), this right is the basis and “starting point for any struggle for social justice and equality, against humiliation and the contempt to which millions of human beings are subjected for having been born poor”.

In approximately 1940, Gentili (2007) highlights that studies on the economic effects of education began, attributing a fundamental value for the economic development of countries to it, starting to influence political discourse. The author (2007, p.1074) emphasises that:

It is notable that there was no direct reference to the arguments that justify the value of education from its contribution to the production of wealth in the United Nations’ declaration. However, this was the conception that tended to be imposed, against the trend towards the egalitarian and radically democratic political interpretation which drew to a close 60 years ago, which is the recognition of education as a fundamental human right.

I agree with Gentili that there had been a trend to subordinate educational policies to the economic area. For Ball (1998, p. 122), what had been taking place is that “the educational systems had become marketable or negotiable products as part of a national impulse which centred on efficiency”. I emphasise that the role of the school cannot be reduced to forming people who are able to respond to the requirements

of the productive sector but as one that favours the construction of new mentalities and citizens with rights.

Faced with this scenario, I subdivided the article into the following topics: (a) Introduction; (b) Ball and the concepts of performativity and new managerialism; (c) Methodological course; (d) Context of text production for the proposal; (e) Class Council and Study Centre meetings and (f) Final considerations.

### **Ball and the concepts of performativity and new managerialism**

For a discussion related to guaranteeing the right to education under a performance logic, I used Stephen Ball's contributions (2002, 2004).

Ball (1998) suggests that governments around the world have adopted similar solutions for educational problems, despite the peculiarities of each society. However, this global policy for education has performativity and managerialism in common, taking on different forms and levels in each society/context. This public sector re-structuring has resulted in a transformation in the configuration of school management, the learning experience, working practices, organisational methods and social relations. Generally speaking, there was a change in the way that schools operate in relation to the values and culture which interfere in the curriculum and forms of assessment (BALL, 1998).

In Ball's opinion (2004), education is subject to economic pre-suppositions and prescriptions and the type of culture and school is defined from this. According to the author, "the business world is increasingly focusing on educational services as an expanding area, in which considerable profit should be obtained" (BALL, 2004, p. 1111). It should be emphasised that this process does not take place in the same way and with the same effects everywhere, as these processes are not clear cut.

The role of the State starts to be that of developing capital through joint social and economic policies because of new economic forms which

require an increasingly qualified labour force. Pacheco (2000, p. 10) highlights that the presuppositions of the theory of capital are therefore recovered, “placing education as one of the pillars of an economic building, especially if it is understood as merchandise, a product, a consumer good and not a public service”. In order for the school to fulfil the role that is designated to prepare this labour force, changes to the curriculum become fundamental, so that the students are prepared for work and to accept “the assumptions of liberal belief” (SILVA, 1994, p. 12). The challenge is in “preparing them” for an increasingly restricted labour market, where only the best will be successful.

New managerialism is established in this context, which is an organisational model centred on people, who begin to be motivated to produce quality and excellence on their own account. A manager’s role becomes that of leader, responsible for encouraging the team to have a collective commitment of always being the best. The leader also inspires discourse on each person’s accountability, which is measured by the result of goals reached and linked to financial incentives. Education starts to be considered as “forms of production and supply which should fulfil market objectives of the efficient transfer of quality control” (BOYLES, 2000, p. 120 apud BALL, 2004, p. 116).

Therefore, the public sector starts to operate increasingly similarly to that of the private sector, “with commercial sensibility and utilitarian morality in educational practices” (BALL, 2004, p. 1116) established by the culture of performativity.

For Ball (1998, 2002, 2004), performativity is a mechanism of indirect control from a distance which replaced intervention and prescription by establishing objectives, accounts and comparisons. Distance control of schools takes place through decentralisation, which starts to give them financial administrative and pedagogical autonomy. However, State control is maintained through productivity and/or results attained by schools, instituted by new managerialism.

Therefore, this means an organisational transformation of the school and the attributes of “being a teacher”. The teaching staff are transformed into producers/suppliers, educational businessmen, subject

to assessment, analysis and performance based payments, which is “a clear indicator of the pressure to make us a company, living a life of calculations” (BALL, 2002, p. 6).

In addition to the change in the manager’s role, Ball (2002) puts forward changes in teachers’ relationships and subjectivities<sup>3</sup>, in that they are revamped as educational producers and entrepreneurs. The most important item is their placement in a school assessment ranking, coupling this to the payment of bonuses and incentives.

According to Ball (2002), this process promotes two conflicting effects. On one hand is the increased individualisation of educators, instituted by competition and pressure for increased production. Solidarity based on a common professional identity is destroyed and causes diminishing social relationships. People start to be valued for their productivity alone, therefore changing the ethic of relationships based on institutional self-interest and performative value. On the other hand, increased membership in trade unions results, as a way of opposing the construction of new forms of institutional memberships based on business culture.

Therefore social services (such as education) in new managerialism, start to be considered as products, compared to “*hard services*” (the supply of books, transport, meals and instructional media), which could be standardised, calculated, qualified and compared” (BALL, 2004, p. 1116). Performance starts to be linked to a compensation and sanction system, resembling the private sector and modifying morality in educational practices, which start to be regulated by forms of business control.

In order for teachers to be able to attain the requirements and objectives specified externally, they are often obliged to abandon their belief in “what” and “how” to teach and how to relate to their students to “enter market logic”. This creates a feeling of instability due to the

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<sup>3</sup> Subjectivities are “standards according to which experiential and emotional contexts, feelings, images and memories are organized to form our own image, the feeling of ourselves and of others and our possibilities of existence” (DE LAURENTIS, 1986, p. 5 apud BALL, 2002, p. 19).

constant changes in requirements and classifications between schools. The teachers start to work, think and act in numbers, performance indicators, comparisons and competitions.

Therefore, pragmatism, institutional self-interest and competition start to form part of a new, organisational language instead of ethics. The way that schools are administered and the relationship that is established between education professionals are then changed. It is this relationship that the article discusses in the following topics.

### **Methodological course**

The research was carried out in a school located in the west zone of Rio de Janeiro which receives children from families with a low purchasing power, whose parents are illiterate or have very little formal education. The school was awarded the title of a readers' school because it performs activities which encourage students to become readers. In addition, the coordinator has invested in the teachers' continued training, concerned with literacy using texts and following the students' learning process. I present the data collected from observations at the Study Centre and Class Council, from interviews carried out with the coordinator and 1<sup>st</sup> year teachers and analyses of official documents, such as Curricular Guidelines and Pedagogical Manuals, in this article.

### **Context of text production for the proposal**

In this subtopic I present some of the measures which demonstrated performance logic and new managerialism of the educational proposal from 2009.

One of the first measures adopted by the Municipal Department of Education (SME) was verifying the learning level for students



in the network. From this diagnosis, it was verified that of the 460,553 students assessed from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> years, “approximately 28,500 students needed some type of additional assistance, as they did not understand what they read and only knew how to write individual letters, without being able to give logical sense to what they wrote” (COSTIN, 2009, p. 1).

Faced with these results, the SME proposed a series of measures, such as: additional school work with university volunteers and interns, constructing a support manual, preparing curricular guidance, creating a strategic council formed by civil society and a partnership with the Ayrton Senna Institute.

The invitation to university volunteers and interns to work with students who presented difficulties in Mathematics and Portuguese language could be considered one of the characteristics of new managerialism described by Ball (2004), in which the government transfers the responsibility of public services to private initiative, which in this case is the volunteers and/or interns.

Apart from this characteristic, I note that the SME encouraged individual performance, one of the particularities of the culture of performativity, through praise and presenting awards to outstanding volunteers during 2009, as well as awarding prizes to the schools which attained the goals defined by the Department.

In relation to rewarding schools, the SME uses the Education Development Index (IDE-Rio) as a basis, which was created to verify the students’ learning stages and to accompany the performance of teachers and teams at each school to improve the students’ learning process. Therefore, in accordance with IDE-Rio performance, schools are awarded prizes or otherwise, which characterises management based on the culture of performativity (BALL, 2004), in which it seeks to inspire everyone’s responsibility for the students’ learning process and establishes competition between schools in relation to awarding prizes and the IDE-Rio ranking.

I present the influence of these two technologies on the coordinators’ and teachers’ performance at the Readers’ School below.

## Class Council and Study Centre Meetings

I analyse the adjustments made by the coordinator on “implementing” the SME’s proposal with the teachers in this sub topic, while focusing on the “assessment category”.

I observed that the coordinator sought to maintain the diagnosis assessment practiced in the school, as well as defending assessment criteria based on the performance model (BERNSTEIN, 2003) expressed in the official SME documents analysed. It is demonstrated that the coordinator sought to balance the external and internal proposals as I demonstrate in the following example:

[...] I respect the difficulties which arise during this 4<sup>th</sup> year. I know that the diagnosis is more important than what I am going to work on. It is already May. There has already been time to get to know and do something with the guy. We may have slipped up by promoting the guy but now he needs to take the Guidance [Curricular] which is ready and see if my student is far from this [than what is proposed] (LEITE, 2012, p. 121)<sup>4</sup>.

It is noted that the coordinator uses the Criteria and Curricular Guidance as a parameter to indicate what needs to be worked on with the student in this example. This is clear in her conversation: *the diagnosis is more important but he needs to take the Orientation to see if the student is far from this*. The coordinator maintains her defence of formative assessment which seeks to diagnose *what* was appropriate for the student, so that interventions can then be proposed. This is a characteristic of the *mixed pedagogical* practice described by Moraes and Neves (2007b, 2009), which confirms the importance of explicit assessment criteria and accompanying the logic of the acquirer’s achievements. In other words, the criteria is defined so that the students and teachers can identify *what* the student is able to acquire from the legitimate text, without desisting in following the logic of his acquisition.

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<sup>4</sup> The data refer to the observations recorded in the Field Diary, May 18, 2011.

The coordinator has gradually been adopting mixed pedagogy in the *assessment* category. This change may be as a result of what Ball (2002, p. 11) suggests in relation to “pressure on individuals, formalised by appraisals/assessments, annual reviews and databases, to contribute to the group’s performativity”. In the case of the municipality of Rio de Janeiro, the Pedagogical Support Manual guidance started to be prepared in accordance with the content determined in the 2011 Bimonthly Assessments. Linking the Manual content with the Assessments caused tension in the school’s work, as the assessment result was linked to IDE-Rio. This may have influenced a change in the discussions at meetings, where the coordinator started to discuss the grades for the students’ bimonthly assessments, which were carried out by the SME, and to compare them with the concept attributed by the teachers. She explained the reason for this comparison in our interview:

*[...] the first time that I worked (bimonthly test and concept results) was to show that our students learn and produce results. My intention is that we keep what is significant, as this is needed from the test (LEITE, 2012, p. 122)<sup>5</sup>.*

The coordinator shows that she is in favour of the bimonthly assessments prepared by the SME because they prioritise content and do not stop responding to the logic of student acquisition. She mentioned that “*we have to serve the student*”. For the coordinator, the assessments confirm the students’ capacity to appropriate the content covered at school. She mentioned: “*they are not poor things*”; “*to show that our students learn and produce results*” and reaffirms her efforts in showing the teachers that it is possible to work with the students at the Readers’ School.

Although the coordinator approves of the bimonthly assessments, she is dissatisfied with the results obtained by the school (Prova Rio and Prova Brasil tests) because, in her opinion, they are not in line with the work developed at the school. She clarified what this means in our interview:

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<sup>5</sup> All the information in italics is a testimony of the coordinator in an interview in July 2011.

*[...] a warped focus. I feel that we still do not have a performance which is in line with what we do. That is why that I usually say that we work a lot for the results that we have. [...] generally speaking, I feel that all the teachers are involved; there is nothing to oppose that. [...] Some teachers are only concerned with an activity on paper. With the time that they spend preparing this activity, they could analyse the student's activity. How did he think? What was the path that he followed? (LEITE, 2012, p. 123).*

For the coordinator, this “warped focus” means that the teachers prepare various activities on paper and work a lot as a consequence. According to her: “*It is known that we do not work 50% but 100%*” (Field Diary, 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2010). However, in the coordinator’s opinion, the work does not provide a positive result because the activities and interventions which are proposed by some teachers “*are not appropriate for the students’ learning levels*”. According to the coordinator, the teachers should stop and analyse: “*how did the student think*” and “*what was the path that he followed*”, to be able to show other pathways. This means identifying the students’ knowledge by proposing activities and interventions that may accompany the acquirers’ achievement logic.

I observed that she constantly covered the issue of focus and needs during the meetings because of this concern. In her words: “*[...] focus on the students’ needs [...] have a goal for the 4<sup>th</sup> two month period*” (LEITE, 2012, p. 124).

While the coordinator simultaneously approaches the question of intervening in accordance with the students’ needs, she is captured by the culture of performativity, which caused a change in the educators’ interpersonal relationships. I noted this trend when she emphasised the goals to be attained, analysed the school’s results in relationship to the network and produced the student performance graphs. However, I perceived that the concern in relation to the results attained in the school is seen in a different form by the coordinator and some teachers. To the coordinator, the results do not reflect the work developed at the school, as they do not attend the students’ needs. However, there was a concern with attaining the goal established by the SME by some teachers, which

would guarantee an award for the school. In addition, some teachers started to encourage contests and competitions between the classes. For example at a meeting the teachers suggested running contests so that the children complied with school regulations.

P<sub>1</sub>: — We could run a competition between the groups to see who is punctual, wears their uniform, sings the anthem...

Deputy Head: — Excellent!

P<sub>1</sub>: — It will get the school into action.

Coordinator: — We'll have the end of year trip (LEITE, 2012, p. 124)<sup>6</sup>.

This discussion shows the influence of the culture of performativity on the teachers' work, as they start to adopt competitions and contests as ways of encouraging the students to comply with school regulations. Inter-class and student competition and rivalry is therefore encouraged, instead of discussing and reflecting the meaning of the regulation for the school to operate well with the students. It appears that the coordinator agreed with the teacher's proposal in this statement. However, I observed that she neither encouraged nor put this proposal into practice.

However, while competition is present in the teachers' work, they also seek to maintain the group focused on a common objective: student learning. As Ball, Maguire e Braun (2012, p. 48) suggest, the teachers "change policy", and are sometimes "changed by it".

If on one hand the coordinator and teachers are "captured" by the culture of performativity, on the other, they seek to maintain the *school's culture* (BALL; MAGUIRE; BRAUN, 2012). One of the examples is an attempt to bring the people that work on collective activities to exchange experiences in the school closer together, such as taking part in a collective snack break.

I observed that the coordinator was concerned in providing a space for exchange between the teachers both before and after the meetings. The collective lunch break which preceded the Study Centre and Class Council

<sup>6</sup> Data collected in observing Meeting of Study Centre on 7 October 2010.

meetings encouraged a relaxed conversation on various subjects, strengthening interpersonal relationships between the teachers and the technical team.

The coordinator sought to strengthen interpersonal relationships during the meetings, including group dynamics carried out at the beginning of each meeting after reading a piece of literature. Sometimes the dynamics were just hugging each other, describing a colleague's characteristics or reading a text and making comments (LEITE, 2012, p. 125). According to the coordinator's point of view, the dynamics "*nourish the subject as a human being*", and pedagogical issues can be approached from these.

Therefore, it was noted that the coordinator implements actions at the school while seeking to ensure that the students learn. For this reason she seeks to maintain a diagnostic assessment in which the objective is to propose interventions which are more relevant to the student's difficulties, so that he can move on from the level where he is currently located. In parallel to this, SME assessment criteria is adopted so that the school's students appropriate the expected content, which is suitable for the school year they are taking.

### **Final considerations**

The data presented shows that the educators at the Readers' School made some adjustments to the SME proposal, while seeking to guarantee the students' right to education.

One of the changes observed during the research refers to the fact that the teachers started to suggest competitions so that the children would comply school regulations. This corroborates with Ball (2004, p. 9) when he affirms that "the act of teaching and the teacher's subjectivity are both deeply altered within this new management vision and new forms of business control". However, the coordinator sought to maintain interpersonal exchanges before and after the meetings, as I mentioned above, with a collective snack break, exchange of experiences and opportunity to express opinions at meetings.

A further adjustment made by the coordinator, along with the teachers, was noted in relation to the *assessment* category. I observed that the pressure of the school having to attain a goal established by the SME influenced the coordinator's work. She began to discuss the goals and school's results in relation to the network, taking student performance graphs to every Class Council. However, while the coordinator discussed these issues with the teachers, they developed collective work on literacy projects, which became a strategy to confront the culture of performativity.

I highlight the fact that the coordinator came close to mixed pedagogy in the *assessment* category put forward by Morais and Neves (2009) as a factor which provides learning for students from specific social backgrounds. The teachers follow the logic of student learning being explicit with the criteria to be attained by the children.

Finally, the SME proposal was adapted according to the school's culture, while the school's pedagogical project was simultaneously modified to attend SME resolutions.

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