

Educational assessment or results policy?

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Abstract

Assessment, a process inherent to human life, in the midst of economic and political transformations, has assumed a regulatory and compensatory character over the years, becoming the main instrument for verifying school performance. This study analyzes how the education indices obtained in external evaluations, with the application of tests on a large scale, reflect on schools in the municipality of Óbidos-Pará. The Basic Education Development Index and field research are used as a reference to compare two different scenarios: schools with positive and negative indices in the Basic Education Development Index. The results reveal the existence of a “Results Policy”, translated into actions of reward or punishment and dissemination of good or bad images in the media, as well as the professional devaluation of teachers and managers, initiatives that corroborate the precariousness of teaching. Consequently, education at the service of capital is promoted, far from the accomplishment of quality in public education.

Keywords

Basic Education Development Index. Public policies in education. Basic education assessment.

Avaliação educacional ou política de resultados?

Resumo

A avaliação, processo inerente à vida humana, em meio a transformações econômicas e políticas, assumiu um caráter regulador e compensatório ao longo dos anos, tornando-se o principal instrumento de verificação do desempenho escolar. O presente estudo analisa como os índices educacionais obtidos em avaliações externas, com aplicação de testes em larga escala, refletem em escolas do município de Óbidos-Pará. Adota-se como referencial o Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica e pesquisa de campo para comparar dois cenários distintos: escolas com índices positivos e negativos no Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica. Os resultados revelam a existência de uma “Política de Resultados”, traduzida em ações de recompensas ou punições e divulgação de imagens boas ou ruins na mídia, bem como a desvalorização profissional dos docentes e gestores, iniciativas que corroboram a precarização do ensino. Como consequência, fomenta-se uma educação a serviço do capital, distante da efetivação da qualidade no ensino público.

Palavras-chave

Índice de Desenvolvimento da Educação Básica. Políticas públicas em educação. Avaliação da educação básica.

¿Evaluación educativa o política de resultados?

Resumen

La evaluación, un proceso inherente a la vida humana, en medio de transformaciones económicas y políticas, ha asumido un carácter regulatorio y compensatorio a lo largo de los años, convirtiéndose en el principal instrumento para verificar el rendimiento escolar. El presente estudio analiza cómo los índices educativos obtenidos en evaluaciones externas, con la aplicación de pruebas a gran escala, se reflejan en las escuelas del municipio de Óbidos-Pará. Se utilizan el Índice de Desarrollo de Educación Básica y la investigación de campo como referencias para comparar dos escenarios diferentes: escuelas con índices positivos y negativos en el Índice de Desarrollo de Educación Básica. Los resultados revelan la existencia de una “Política de Resultados”, traducida en acciones de recompensas o castigos y difusión de buenas o malas imágenes en los medios, así como la devaluación profesional de docentes y directivos, iniciativas que corroboran la precariedad de la enseñanza. Como consecuencia, se promueve la educación al servicio del capital, lejos de la realización de la calidad en la educación pública.

Palabras clave

Índice de Desarrollo de la Educación Básica. Políticas públicas en educación. Evaluación de educación básica.

1 Introduction

Throughout the years, assessment has always been present in human life, an inherent condition in all processes of group and social relations, used as analysis and/or adjustment for the improvement of certain realities (OLIVEIRA, 2018). In indigenous villages, for example, where young people need to show several abilities to be considered genuine warriors, assessment is also present (SUCUPIRA; VASCONCELOS; FIALHO, 2019). The same was seen among Chinese and Greek people thousands of years ago, in their societies, through the criteria defined in the selection of individuals for certain types of work: in China, with the exams that enabled citizens to achieve prestigious positions; in Greece, through the self-evaluation suggested by Socrates (LANNES; VELLOSO, 2007).

According to the changes and transformations in society, assessment started to take on a more structured form after the 18th century, when the first modern schools were founded, marked by the use of educational assessments as a method of evaluation, a process that was associated to the idea of control and regulation (FIALHO; LIMA;

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QUEIROZ, 2019). This process originated docimology, proposed by Henri Piéron in 1920, which consisted of a systematized study of exams – specifically of the grade attribution system and behaviors between evaluators and those evaluated. In the middle of the 19th century, psychometrics emerged, with the establishment of standardized tests and the definition of objectives that tested the intelligence and evaluated the performance of people (LANNES; VELLOSO, 2007).

The year 1934 was marked by the intensification of education through objectives, whose principle was based on the formulation and subsequent verification of its achievements, when the term “educational assessment” was created, proposed by North American educator Ralph Tyler (LANNES; VELLOSO, 2007). The evaluation of education initially consisted of this base of definition and fulfillment of predefined objectives of education processes.

Through the education context of different times of society, assessment has been expanding and presenting itself as the main instrument for analysis, observation, intervention and transformation of social practices, including the reality of education (OLIVEIRA, 2018). In Brazil, government is consolidated as the main agent that formulates an education model aimed at the training/instruction of individuals; they are responsible for the use of evaluations in the administration of those processes. However, even defending the proposition of an education model considered “ideal” for society, this system, in the face of the ideological character and the advances of international entities on Brazilian education, is still focused on the interests of the dominant institutions on training individuals prepared only to fulfill the needs of the capitalist market (FLORENCIO; FIALHO; ALMEIDA, 2017). It is in this perspective that the evaluating government is incorporated: “[...] based on the exacerbated promotion of competition imposed to schools, through standardized evaluations, [...] with the predominance of market instrumentalism that institutes the overvaluation of indices and results” (CARNEIRO, 2012, p. 219, our translation).

In the context of economic and political transformations that have occurred internationally and in Brazil since 1988, such as guidance by international entities, assessment started to have a regulatory and compensatory character, becoming the main instrument to verify school performance (FLORENCIO; FIALHO; ALMEIDA, 2017). We highlight the historical changes related to the evaluation of education in Brazil,

understanding that “[...] the neoliberal method of regulation entailed [...] changes in the role and form of action of government, as well as in educational policies, which started to be guided [...] by the logic of market and competition” (OLIVEIRA, 2018, p. 11, our translation). According to Carneiro (2012, p. 228, our translation), the policies implemented in the country after the 1990s had as a premise “[...] the mark of regulation and control, [...] resulting in the growth of the private sector and subsequent reduction of the public sector, the promotion of competitiveness and the adoption of the market as [...] a reference for education”.

Following the marketing tendency applied to educational assessment in the national sphere, in the state of Pará, located in the Brazilian Amazon region, the influence of this instrument on education institutions was perceptible, specifically in the municipal network, since, through the dissemination of indices obtained in evaluative exams promoted by the government, several interventions on the work performed are propagated (SANTOS; COLARES, 2019). When the indices are good, that means the school is doing a good job; otherwise, the school is associated to a condition of failure of the actions performed, leading to a staff turnover in the administration of the institutions (SOARES; COLARES; OLIVEIRA, 2020). Therefore, “[...] the school becomes the main focus of policies, in which the school’s autonomy is confused with assigning blame for the results” (ROTHEN, 2018, p. 33, our translation).

Within a context of contradictions, educational assessment loses its continuous and procedural essence, becoming mechanized and periodic in the school reality. According to Oliveira (2018, p. 12, our translation), this happens because “[...] the new regulation processes [...] of education public policies started to be conducted in the perspective of a market-State, constituting the so-called evaluating government”. As a result, it is important to observe the privatization proposal for education, contradicting the public character defended by constitutional documents, turning it into an instrument of a marketing nature that inconsequentially compromises the real level and quality of education, when it comes to social integration and development (BANFIELD; HADUNTZ; MAISURIA, 2016).

In this scenario, therefore, there is an increase in the numbers of “[...] projects developed by federal government, through Saeb¹, Prova Brasil², Enade³ and Enem⁴, as well as by state and municipal governments that created their own assessment systems” (SOLIGO, 2010, p. 1, our translation), whose focus is aimed at obtaining data that help formulate new education policies that regulate the resources based on the performance shown in evaluations, because, from that moment on, “[...] educational assessment starts to be used, on one hand, for control and regulation by the government, and, on the other hand, as a mechanism to introduce market logic, in order to achieve higher competition and performance [...]” (OLIVEIRA, 2018, p. 12, our translation), constituting reference matrices for levels and modalities of education.

The assessment begins, thus, to be divided between internal and external. It is considered internal when it is drafted “[...] by the teacher or the education institution, applied recurrently in the school routine and aimed at a value judgement, in order to propose alternatives in the context of the classroom or the school” (PAR/Plataforma Educacional, 2019, our translation). It is considered external when it is drafted “[...] by an institution other than schools, aiming to evaluate students in order to compare their performance with that of other students in different contexts” (PAR/Plataforma Educacional, 2019, our translation). Therefore, external assessments provide data that become the base for public institutions and, consequently, for the creation of education policies. Thus, they can be: summative, whose objective is to inform the evaluator about the level of knowledge acquisition of the student evaluated; formative, a continuous assimilation process of new knowledge; diagnostic, in order to identify students’

¹ National Basic Education Assessment System, whose goal is to organize, manage and disseminate education assessment in Brazil in two-year periods, using a sample of students, producing information about the educational reality in different regions of the country, under the responsibility of the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research “Anísio Teixeira” (Inep, in Portuguese).

² Legally defined as National Evaluation of School Performance (Anresc, in Portuguese), it is a type of educational assessment created in 2005 in Brazil, complementing Saeb and becoming one of the components to calculate Ideb. This evaluation includes only students from grades 5 and 9 and from the last year of high school.

³ The National Assessment of Student Achievement consists of a specific exam that takes place annually to compose the educational assessment of Brazilian Higher Education courses, evaluating freshmen and graduating students from that modality.

⁴ National Exam of Upper Secondary Education, used to compose the educational assessment of Secondary Education in Brazil, appraising the quality of education. The results from this educational assessment become, mostly, an instrument to enter Higher Education, becoming the biggest entrance examination in Brazil.

knowledge, a type of subject measurement; among other classifications (LANNES; VELLOSO, 2007).

In that perspective, the study analyzes how education indices obtained in external assessments, through the application of tests on a large scale, reflect on schools in the municipality of Óbidos, in Pará (PA). To fulfill that purpose, the data from the Basic Education Development Index (Ideb, in Portuguese) are used as a reference. As specific objectives, we aim to: identify the data obtained by schools in the public municipal network of Óbidos/PA in Ideb; discover the administrators' perception of educational assessment; and analyze how these indices influence the work carried out at education institutions that were the object of this study.

The research took place through a qualitative study that threw light on the subjectivities of individuals involved in the assessment process, in this case, the administrators, considering their contexts. Many authors develop qualitative researches and advocate for their relevance in order to better understand unique educational contexts (GOMES-DA-SILVA, 2014; DINARTE; CORAZZA, 2016; LIMA; SANTOS, 2018; MORGADO, 2016; REBELO; BORGES, 2010; PEREZ, 2012), therefore, we believe that this approach enables the analysis of details not contemplated in macrosocial research.

The field study, of a comparative nature, confronted two different scenarios: schools with positive results (which have reached and/or surpassed the goals set) and negative results (which can't reach the goals and are far from the defined indices) in Ideb. Among the data collection techniques used, we highlight: research in government websites, which present the education indices of selected institutions; and application of semi-structured interviews with four school administrators from the public municipal network. Two of the administrators were from schools with positive results and the other two were from institutions with negative results, aiming to identify practices, challenges and perceptions concerning the theme.

We also emphasize that, based on the systematization of the data, the responses of interviewees were represented in the form of citations with literal transcriptions, marked by the use of *italics* in the cited excerpts. In order to maintain the anonymity of research subjects, the interviewees were identified by letters (A, B, C, D).

This article is comprised of three thematic blocks for analysis: *The educational scenario of Óbidos/PA in the context of Ideb*, presenting the indices obtained and their effects in the school reality; *Educational assessment in the perception of administrators*, verifying how they perceive assessment, highlighting practices, challenges and perspectives in their reality; and *A “Results Policy” is present*, discussing the ideological-marketing character applied to assessment and bestowed on schools.

2 The educational scenario of Óbidos/PA in the context of Ideb

The municipality of Óbidos/PA currently has 107 schools, 90 in the rural area and 17 within the city, with an estimated population of 52,137 people (IBGE, 2019). However, due to difficulties related to the difficult access to institutions located in the rural area, this study involved only the urban area. Out of 17 institutions, we chose 12 that belong to the public municipal network, excluding two schools that are undergoing an accreditation phase in order to be authorized to operate by the Ministry of Education, one school that didn't have data concerning Ideb in the time period stipulated by the study, and two schools that are part of the state network.

The first stage of the study consisted of knowing the grades obtained and the goals set for the schools, through searches in the Ideb website⁵, within a time period of seven years (2011-2017), since these results are published by the Ministry of Education every two years. The 2019 data are under construction.

Created in 2007 by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research “Anísio Teixeira” (Inep, in Portuguese), Ideb became an indicator of predicted actions and goals for the education system. It results from the combination of two factors: “a) indicators of flow (passing, failing and school evasion rates), measured in the School Census; and b) indicators of performance in standardized exams” (PAZ, 2009, p. 12-13, our translation).

Education exams that integrate the National Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb, in Portuguese), applied on a large scale in Brazil every two years, among them the National Assessment of Alphabetization (ANA, in Portuguese), National

⁵ Data available for examinations on: <http://inep.gov.br/educacao-basica/ideb/resultados>. Access on: 10 Apr. 2020.

Assessment of Basic Education (Aneb, in Portuguese) and National Evaluation of School Performance (Anresc, in Portuguese), also known as Prova Brasil, seek to reveal data about different public education institutions, enabling the analysis of the quality of education, quantified in numeric values.

Included in this system, schools receive a performance grade. Table 1 shows a panorama of the schools in Óbidos/PA:

Table 1 – Ideb goals and indices regarding the schools in Óbidos/PA between 2011 and 2017

Ideb results in Óbidos/PA (2011-2017)								
Selected schools (urban area)	2011		2013		2015		2017	
	Goal	Obtained index	Goal	Obtained index	Goal	Obtained index	Goal	Obtained index
School 1	3.9	3.9	4.2	4.0	4.5	4.6	4.8	4.7
School 2	3.4	1.9	3.7	3.6	4.0	4.4	4.3	4.6
School 3	4.5	5.3	4.8	5.6	5.0	5.8	5.3	6.4
School 4	4.0	3.4	4.4	2.9	4.8	3.3	5.1	3.4
School 5	3.3	3.4	3.6	3.8	3.9	3.8	4.2	4.1
School 6	3.4	4.3	3.7	4.4	4.0	4.4	4.3	5.1
School 7	3.6	3.6	3.9	5.0	4.2	5.9	4.5	4.9
School 8	3.7	3.6	4.0	4.1	4.3	5.1	4.6	5.8
School 9	4.6	5.2	4.9	5.2	5.1	5.9	5.4	6.2
School 10	3.6	3.6	3.9	3.9	4.2	4.6	4.5	5.0
School 11	3.6	–	3.9	3.8	4.2	4.2	4.5	4.7
School 12	4.0	3.9	4.4	3.7	4.8	3.4	5.0	3.5

Source: Designed by the authors based on searches on the Inep Portal (2020).

Table 1 shows the last four results published by Ideb for the 12 schools researched, among which nine offer early childhood education and elementary school, and three (schools 2, 4 and 12) offer middle school.

The first observation when analyzing Table 1 is that most schools that offer early childhood education and elementary school have been aligned to the goals proposed to them, achieving satisfactory results from a governmental point of view. On the other hand, institutions that offer middle school haven't been able to completely achieve the desired numbers, with results below the expected average, accompanied by an increase in school evasion rates and failing students, which can constitute a delay from a governmental perspective, which tries to "[...] equalize the results of Brazilian education

to education in developed countries [...]” (SILVA, G.; SILVA, A.; SANTOS, 2019, p. 270, our translation), forgetting the lack of structural and social conditions to achieve that premise.

We also verify the existence of three institutions (that offer early childhood education and elementary school) with higher results than just meeting the goals defined by Ideb: School 3, leading with the highest grade; School 9, the second place in positive results achieved; and School 7, in third place. About this classification practice that encourages the competition between institutions, we restate the position assumed by Carneiro (2012, p. 219, our translation), in which we nowadays look at “[...] the increase of government control over curriculum issues, as well as over financial resources invested in the education sector, changing [...] the ways to regulate the system [...] through assessment”. This happens, according to Bego (2016, p. 9, our translation), because:

As every modern institution, school has systemic components that are guided by the subsystems Economy and Government, responsible for facilitating their material and institutional reproduction. These components are directed by teleological and strategic actions responsible for organizing the guidelines and rules that guarantee the institution’s operation. In the context of the systemic sphere, we find the legal prescriptions, the definition of funding and resources, the working arrangement of the professionals [...].

We observed that, between 2015 and 2017, Schools 7 and 9 had the same school administration staff, attempting to follow assessment prescriptions imposed by the government. This fact may have collaborated for a work better aligned to the requirements of educational assessments, such as the control of school evasion rates and number of failing students and the effort to increase averages in standardized tests.

The institution that obtained the highest indices in Ideb in Óbidos/PA was School 3. This fact entails the compensatory character assumed by educational assessment in the country, because, in addition to positive images disseminated in the media, it enabled the increase of resources for that institution, since Ideb is nowadays the “[...] guide of contemporary education policies for basic education, because all political references [...] use it as a reference [...]” (SILVA, G.; SILVA, A.; SANTOS, 2019, p. 274, our translation).

The high scores obtained by School 3 are also possibly justified by the reduced number of students per classroom (an average of 16 students), which is a condition that facilitates the teachers' work. Differently from that condition, the other institutions in Óbidos/PA have higher enrollment demands, resulting in crowded classrooms (30-35 students per classroom), as the School Census from 2017 and 2018 indicate⁶. This event doesn't have an officially attested indicator, since the institution offers the same number of spots as the others during enrollment period, but the demand in that community is smaller, though we can infer the matter of the school's location in a central area and close to other three establishments with bigger facilities located in the same neighborhood. Qualitative aspects, effectively, aren't taken into consideration in quantitative evaluations, which compare indices between schools without considering their social context and their reality (TORRES, 2010).

Another issue observed was the historic condition of three schools that didn't reach their goals in 2017, envisioning different situations between them: School 1, showing improvement throughout the years, even reaching the goal in 2015; School 4, which oscillates, in spite of staying far from the goals; and School 12, which gets farther from the goal year after year.

In the next section, we show how the municipal education administrators perceive the assessment practice on a large scale and, at the same time, how they deal with the requirements from that system.

3 Educational assessment in the perception of administrators

The interviews with the four administrators allow us to understand how they perceive educational assessment in their institutions. Studies of this nature enable the administrators to think critically about educational praxis, as well as reflect about the objectives of education and teacher training (COLARES, A.; COLARES, M., 2013; FINO, 2016; LARA, 2016; MORORÓ, 2017; PEREIRA; RIBEIRO, 2017).

⁶ We recommend an analysis of all institutions selected for the study, observing the distribution of students in classrooms. Data available on: https://www.qedu.org.br/cidade/3374-obidos/censo-escolar?year=2018&dependence=0&localization=0&education_stage=0&item. Access on: 10 Apr. 2020.

In the search to define the meaning of the term “educational assessment”, the study verifies that part of the interviewees simply replicate the governmental discourse, classifying it as an important practice to improve education and to boost the “quality of education” in the municipal, state and national spheres. This type of concept, usually aligned to the intentions of those in power, is common in the education field, since, according to Bego (2016, p. 11, our translation):

[...] there is a shift from the protagonism of the institution in the definition of the school's work to the protagonism of the process, i.e., the school's work begins to be defined by experts in higher positions, and the school is merely executing it. Pedagogical technicism promoted suppression in the autonomy of education institutions by previously establishing how the education process should happen and defining what teachers and students should do.

Added to that is the fact that all administrators interviewed reached the management position through political appointment, which, consequently, can promote acquiescence toward the intentions of public entities. Nevertheless, some of those professionals acknowledge that the act of evaluating is becoming an instrument to measure and analyze the work developed according to legal requirements, as expressed in the speech of one of the interviewees in the following excerpt: “*I understand that the act of evaluating became a way for the government to check the achievement of their plans [...]. Everyone is evaluated through the students' performance. It is bad to depend on their grades, since we never know what to expect from those exams*” (Education Administrator A, 2019, our translation).

Administrator A's statement indicates a concern with the manner how assessment is being conceived in school, becoming an instrument of regulation, as well as leaving the students at the mercy of political and market interests, abandoning the holistic and citizen education of these individuals in the favor of the search for positive results in standardized exams, which contradicts the democratic principle, because, although “[...] it is guaranteed in legal instruments, we consider that its materialization process is contradictory, slow and full of conflict, advances and setbacks, because we still experience authoritarian and patronage practices [...]” (CARDOZO; COLARES, 2020, p. 6, our translation).

It is noteworthy that the administrators, due to their desire to maintain their jobs, tend to become inclined to fulfill the demands posed by external assessments,

even if characterized as negative, guaranteeing the achievement of good results, exclusively reflected on reaching and/or surpassing the predefined goal. Otherwise, those professionals are doomed to risk losing resources for their schools or even losing their positions, as we observe in this report by Administrator D (2019, our translation): *“In the last school where I worked, we even had part of our funding cut because of a low score on that exam, in addition to having a negative image for society, since they associated a negative result in the assessment with a failure in my job as administrator”*.

By having the function of regulation, accountability and social and governmental control over activities developed in school, the assessment is characterized as a vertical imposition that creates fear and insecurity for administrators, who may be seen as unable to develop the education process and suffer further professional devaluation. It doesn't matter, in this situation, all the educational work carried out by administrators if they don't obtain positive indices in large-scale exams. It is in this context that, analyzing Ideb and the assessment practices employed, Silva, G., Silva, A. and Santos (2019, p. 282, our translation) state that “[...] this instrument is unfair, exclusionary and doesn't meet the concerns of a referenced public education [...]”.

Regarding the organization of the school environment and the countless processes surrounding educational assessment, it is noticeable that the latter becomes the main focus in education institutions, the main concern in an administrator's work and strict requirements for teachers, actions that are understood based on the ideological character assumed by creators of education policies over the last years. About schools' preparation for educational assessment, we highlight two excerpts mentioned by interviewees during the research:

Throughout my professional life, I haven't known of any schools that don't worry about this assessment. It shows if the work developed is successful or not, and it causes increase and decrease in funding. At that moment, the entire community is mobilized [...]. (Education Administrator B, 2019, our translation).

When we get the notification about the application of the exam and the date, everything becomes chaos, because there is huge despair over the fear of failure in this assessment. That is a moment when everyone is mobilized to help the students to better understand questions and avoid mistakes so that the school's scores won't suffer. (Education Administrator C, 2019, our translation).

It is noteworthy and, simultaneously, questionable how committed the education professionals seem to be in that process, imprisoned by external educational demands originated from the national system, including demands that aren't relevant for the local reality. Assessment should be a natural activity, to monitor and improve education, however, as it is carried out, it is punitive and takes the focus away from the main function of pedagogical actions, which is educating. Training students to answer standardized tests is prioritized, while minimizing the commitment to an effective education, respecting differences and valuing students' knowledge and experiences as individuals under potential construction (SOUSA; NASCIMENTO, 2018). And there isn't adequate training for teachers and administrators to be able to handle these changes in education (CARVALHO; DAMASCENO; MOURA, 2019; GENÚ, 2018; SANTOS; FERREIRA; SIMÕES, 2019).

In 2018, year when the tests from the School Assessment System of Pará (Sispae, in Portuguese) took place in municipal schools that offer elementary school, we highlight that this procedure only encompassed 4th grade students in Óbidos/PA, not only overwhelming teachers with the pressure for positive results, but also emotionally harming them due to the speed and effectiveness of actions and decisions to achieve that premise. In this reality, we emphasize the speech of one administrator:

In our school, only one student group took the test this year. Thus, all the responsibility was dumped on one teacher. Whether we want to or not, expectations are high for that score, since a lot depends on it at the school. Now imagine how that teacher feels knowing about the pressure on their work. (Education Administrator D, 2019, our translation).

According to the issue described, the responsibility is associated to teachers, since they are committed to the task of transmitting knowledge and accompanying students in its use in real situations, such as assessment exams. Historically, the teacher is the first person to be blamed for the poor performance of a student, without considering the social, economic and cultural conditions experienced by each student (LOPES, 2019; SOARES; VIANA, 2016). This situation prevents an emancipatory education aimed at freedom and the exercise of citizenship (SMYTH; HAMEL, 2016; VASCONCELOS; FIALHO; LOPES, 2018).

Strictly speaking, many questions in Prova Brasil, for example, require an ability that is often beyond the level of knowledge acquired and experienced by students,

especially those who live with the routine of crowded classrooms, where the teacher doesn't have the time for individual interactions that promote real and qualitative efficacy of learning. Faced with these internal obstacles, we emphasize the opinion of Anjos (2012, p. 9, our translation), when stating that:

The number of functions that the professional accumulates and the increase in workload being implemented are gradually incorporated into the teacher's routine. This professional, who works with knowledge, but has no time to reflect about their pedagogical actions, who indirectly evaluates and is evaluated, being divested of that instrument that is evaluating as part of a process, and not an end, seems to become an instrument to implement policies.

About the ways to prepare students to take educational assessment exams in Óbidos/PA, the study reveals the existence of a technical work, reflected on the application of extensive work sheets, mock exams, tests, uninterested reading, tools that aim to "ingrain" in the students the knowledge required by the education entities. Regarding these practices, one of the interviewees presents an important reflection, stating that:

We have a problem here concerning preparing students for those exams, especially Prova Brasil, because some schools usually stop their activities two or three weeks before in order to train students for these evaluations, which shows that they didn't measure the students' knowledge level for that grade, but the repetition of subjects trained previously. This explains their success in achieving the indices. (Education Administrator A, 2019, our translation).

The opinion shown is critical, in the sense of revealing practices that hide the students' real knowledge, giving way to proposals that oppress those individuals and their potential in order to demonstrate "necessary abilities", resulting from the governmental base. Born from new requirements and allied to the interests of the market, the school undergoes breaks between its original social function and the new paths designed by contemporary neoliberalism. Or, as described by Silva, G., Silva, A. and Santos (2019, p. 282, our translation):

In the way that reforms grounded education policies, we can analyze that they became spaces to standardize education, quantify learning and evaluate the actors involved in the pedagogical process. The business logic is present in education actions and enabled the school to become an empty, meaningless place, with an emphasis on meritocracy, competitiveness, efficiency and efficacy.

Therefore, regarding the administrators' perception on educational assessment, prevails the idea of obligation, efficiency and productivity, encouraging meritocracy (with resources, awards, acknowledgement, among others), although we know that "The school, in a democratic perspective, enables discussion spaces for everyone to participate in important decisions and in everyday actions" (COLARES; BRYAN, 2014, p. 175, our translation). The next section discusses the "Results Policy" in Óbidos/PA.

4 A "Results Policy" is present

The term "Results Policy", used to describe the ideological and exclusionary obstacles in the educational assessment practices, in the reality of Óbidos/PA, upholds the idea of a policy implemented in schools concerning the education indices obtained in external evaluations, in which goals are stipulated to users, imposing the obligation to reach them. The results, in this case, are constructed through positive performances acquired in evaluation dynamics. *A priori*, the data become political-ideological instruments, whose treatment takes place favoring individual interests, to the detriment of the collective. According to Pacheco and Sousa (2016, p. 72, our translation), this happens because we currently live in "[...] a time when neoliberal rationality becomes increasingly [...] legitimizing of homogeneous training and education policies, processes and practices, and, therefore, of curriculum proposals standardized in results [...]".

The data analyzed in the light of the interviews evidence that culture and the political use of the results are still present in institutions, marked by legal impositions and, consequently, meritocracy, minimizing students' learning and exacerbating the implementation of the partisan political proposal for Brazilian public schools, with a focus on privatizing education in the country. In that perspective, Bego (2016, p. 21, our translation) states that:

The configuration into a place that executes actions predetermined by others causes the school institution to have its role reduced in the development of educational actions. An institution reduced to that role stops questioning broader issues, of philosophical, ideological and political natures, in summary, issues about the basis of everyday actions carried out in school by the

different actors, who, entrusted with the task of technically efficient executors, are removed from those discussions and entirely focused on specific and individualized resolutions of problems and challenges that emerge from the school routine.

In Goal 7 of the National Education Plan (PNE, in Portuguese, 2014-2024), instituted by Law n. 13.005/2014, the interests surrounding educational assessment become clear (in strategies 7.4, 7.6, 7.9 and 7.36) through the definition of actions that can meet Ideb's goals, specifically when stating, according to strategy 7.9, the need for guidance of the education networks and systems in order to "[...] attempt to reach the goals [...], reducing the difference between schools with the lowest indices and the national average, guaranteeing equal learning [...]" (BRASIL, 2014, our translation). Along with that, according to strategy 7.36, the document also aims to "[...] establish stimulus policies for schools that improve their performance [...], in order to value the merit of the teaching staff, the administration and the school community" (BRASIL, 2014, our translation). Once again, the game of interests is preserved.

In the context of resources destined to education institutions in the country, we emphasize the Money Straight to School Program (PDDE, in Portuguese), whose objective is to financially support administrative-pedagogical activities necessary to schools' maintenance and operation. According to the interviewees, the program's distribution of resources is directly influenced by the results obtained in educational assessments. Therefore, if the school reached the goals, it will receive more funding, confirming a means of "incentive" (as described in strategy 7.36 of PNE) to improve the work developed. Otherwise, funding is reduced, placing the administrator in complex situations to conduct the institution during that school year. In the municipality researched, in 2017, there were schools without budget, without funding from that program, requiring "creativity" by the administrative staff in fundraising. Education Administrator C's statement illustrates that resource distribution process locally: *"If nowadays our institution has all this infrastructure, it's due to the results obtained in Ideb. With satisfactory results, our funding increased via PDDE and then we invested in improving our spaces, offering better conditions for the students"*.

In the central condition assumed by assessment in education policies, the former may become the biggest responsible for the fragility in indices obtained in Ideb, among others, due to the contextless condition, becoming disjointed from the interests of

students and, thus, promoting monotonous and repetitive education, maybe consisting, although not documented, one of the causes for the expressive rates of failing students and school evasion.



We understand, therefore, that educational assessment goes beyond a single moment of exam application to verify students' knowledge. It is perpetuated as a reproductivist ideological machine of a capitalistic society, with an emphasis in obtaining positive results, extracted from a complexity of tests created to measure the development of competencies and abilities. About the *usability* of such ideological instruments to verify the "quality of education", we understand that:

This position makes the culture of cognition become a matrix for curriculum construction, promoting a conceptual knowledge related to school subjects, or, better put, to certain school subjects, such as math, science and the mother tongue, which become the main components of a new curriculum organization that seeks social affirmation of a universal knowledge, supposedly translated in the notion of powerful knowledge. (PACHECO; SOUSA, 2016, p. 71, our translation).

With the reflection presented by the authors, some questions arise, among them: what is "quality" for the Brazilian education system? Is it the indices obtained or the development of abilities necessary to a citizen education? How to interpret this quality defended in public policies? Should we connect quality with the mechanization of knowledge or confine it to the process of acquisition of abilities and competencies?

These questions are valid when observing the local reality, visualizing practices of technical preparation of students for educational assessments, curtailing student and teacher autonomy, confining the administrator to replicate impositions from dominant institutions, privileging some fields of knowledge (usually Portuguese and Math) while the others are excluded, and corroborating increasingly precarious education, the professional devaluation of teachers and administrators and the continuity of market practices that are anchored, little by little, on the public education in Brazil.

Therefore, it is noticeable that we live a dichotomy in schools, in which, on one side, are the demands of the education system, and, on the other, is the students' reality. Thus, although it is a diagnostic of the students' knowledge, the political-ideological use of assessment is undeniable, a finality aimed at the consolidation of successful projects, avoiding the condition of failure by overlooking quality for quantity in public institutions. As the section title announces, a results policy is present.

5 Final considerations

Throughout the study, the results reveal the existence of a “Results Policy” in educational assessment, translated in rewarding or punitive actions and the dissemination of good or bad images in media, as well as in the professional devaluation of teachers and administrators, initiatives that corroborate an increasingly precarious education. Consequently, an education that serves capital is promoted, far from increasing the quality of public education.

As for the main question in the title of this article, we state that educational assessment becomes concealed in its diagnostic character, being replaced by ideological and marketing actions that use the results to quantify educational practices and processes, abandoning the qualitative function, which would enable the effective development of quality in students’ learning, characterizing, thus, a results policy.

One of the intentions in this study is to enable not only the reader’s exercise of criticism surrounding the presented actions and practices, but also the reflection about aspects of the theme educational assessment, aiming to overcome images expressed in news stories and other articulations around results that weaken the work of Brazilian educators. In other words, we intend to reinforce the understanding that it isn’t about the administrator or the teacher, nor about students’ performance, but about conditions to which they are subjected. The individuals in the school staff are seen as “real survivors” amid an exclusionary and oppressive system.

The assessment, which should constitute a formative, procedural and continuous process, becomes a mechanic, contextless and ideological instrument, inappropriate to preserve the public character of Brazilian schools as being accessible, democratic, inclusive and diverse. Difficult times await us (and the crisis in Brazilian education may already be included in that condition), but it is necessary to resist for the preservation of the universal commitment to a free and quality education, socially referenced. We shall walk together in the same direction.

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