




## Accountability on basic education: new modes of regulation and results control

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### Abstract

This article aims to analyze accountability policies as a strategy for the regulation of Basic Education, which has strengthening social control and monitoring in the field of assessment. For its scope, a bibliographic review was carried out according to the main theoretical references that study this problem (AFONSO, 2009a; 2009b; BONAMIMO; SOUSA, 2012; SOUZA, 2016; SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015; CERDEIRA, 2018; FRANCO; CALDERÓN, 2017). As a result, initiatives to make school management professionals and teachers responsible were identified. It is concluded that it is possible to go beyond the existing dichotomies between regulation and control of results as inherent to assessments, and through that criticize the policies that envisage the emptying of pedagogical work in the face of proposition of actions to expand the performance of school institutions in the exams and positioning in national rankings.

**Keywords:** Accountability. Regulation. Results control. Basic Education.

## Accountability na educação básica: novos modos de regulação e controle de resultados

### Resumo

Este artigo tem como objetivo analisar as políticas de accountability enquanto estratégia para a regulação da Educação Básica, que reforçam controle e monitoramento dos resultados educacionais. Para o seu alcance realizou-se uma revisão bibliográfica segundo as principais referências teóricas que estudam essa problemática (AFONSO, 2009a; 2009b; BONAMIMO; SOUSA, 2012; SOUZA, 2016; SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015; CERDEIRA, 2018; FRANCO; CALDERÓN, 2017). Como resultados, foram identificadas as iniciativas de



responsabilização dos profissionais da gestão escolar e professores. Conclui-se que é possível ir além das dicotomias existentes entre regulação e controle de resultados como inerentes a avaliação, e com isso tecer a crítica as políticas que vislumbram o esvaziamento do trabalho pedagógico face a proposição de ações para ampliação do desempenho das instituições escolares nos exames e posicionamento nos *rankings* nacionais.

**Palavras-chave:** *Accountability*. Regulação. Controle de resultados. Educação Básica.

## 1 Introduction

This research is situated in the context of the New Public Management, more precisely in the analysis of the theoretical assumptions that support the implementation of accountability processes (evaluation, accountability and responsibility) in Basic Education, triggered by educational reforms resulting from state transformations in the last decades of the twentieth century.

The general objective of this research is to analyze accountability policies as a strategy for the regulation of Basic Education, which reinforce control and monitoring of educational results. The specific objectives were to describe the relations and articulations between regulation in the educational sphere and the accountability model; and to analyze dialectically the intersection between evaluations and the perspective of control of results in Basic Education through accountability policies.

The evaluation policies as regulation strategies are circumscribed in dynamics of social production linked to the capitalist production mode (HARVEY, 2014; LAVAL, 2019), and of systemic reproduction of the neoliberal ideology assumed as support for state reforms that resonate since the 1970s, in the crisis of the capitalist economic production model (MÉSZÁROS, 2008; HARVEY, 2014), until the present day.

For education, this has meant the production of systems of evaluation and analytical comparison of "quantitativized" school performance (AFONSO, 2009a) intersected by quasi-market logics (LE GRAND, 1991) and intervention of private bodies



in education, legitimizing the assumption of ideologies of economic management and efficiency, under the proclaimed mantle of innovation and modernization of educational policy (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015; LAVAL, 2019).

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In order to circumscribe the aforementioned reforms and how they have induced the production of educational policies, we consider, in the national scenario, the reform of the state apparatus in the mid-1990s. Thus, in a perspective of reorganization of the state apparatus, the New Public Management, based on managerial ideology, comes to assume centrality in terms of political and socioeconomic reorganization where the State imports to the public sphere logics characteristic of the market, deregulating and privatizing services and materializing preconditions to offer them by the private initiative (CABRAL NETO, 2009).

Afonso (2003) reinforces that, in this context, strictly state competencies related to public services acquire new relevance when they involve changes in the lines of intervention from the state. These changes did not necessarily result in a decrease in the degree of state control over relevant aspects of service offerings, but began to consider what the author elaborates as an interpenetration between market and state (AFONSO, 1999).

Souza (2010), corroborates the above when outlining possibilities regarding the concept of quasi-market, and argues that despite the impossibility of total privatization or transfer of public education supply to the private sphere, there is poignantly, in the spirit of modernization of public management, a prescription of mechanisms and ideology of mercantile bias to be assumed in the management of these services.

This link to the precepts of the market and the meaning of competitiveness as an aegis, under which school management would be guided in the managerialist conception, is prevalent in the discourse of modernization, especially in what is perceived the belief in the regulatory instance of the market, as well as in the ideologies of meritocratic order and neoliberalist ideals (SOUZA, 2016). It is in this scenario that emerged the initiatives



of accountability of school management professionals and teachers allied to the creation of a space of protagonism, whether users of school services or professionals, in a sense of participation inherent in the decision-making process (CABRAL NETO, 2009)..

These managerial inferences, woven in the formulation of educational policies, and their strategies regarding the maintenance and increase of quality in education as a guarantee of school success, were incorporated as pillars for a design of reforms in the educational field, weaving relationships between accountability and the assumptions of participation, autonomy and decentralization (SOUZA, 2016), evoking the regulation of educational systems as a device for control and administration of results.

Thus, the main question that has guided this work is whether the accountability policies would constitute a new strategy for regulation, or whether they would be just another form of reinforcement for social control and monitoring in the field of evaluation. In this sense, the writing is established in a descriptive-theoretical perspective, developed from a literature review that includes the debate about the potentialities built before the roles that evaluation and regulation assume, in view of the use of the accountability model to achieve the educational policy as a product of an alleged re-democratization in the sphere of governance in the public sector.

Thus, the article is organized in four complementary sections. The first section is this introduction. The second section develops a critical reflection on the existing relations between regulation and the accountability model. In the third section, a dialectical analysis is made between evaluations and the perspective of control of results in Basic Education within the framework of accountability policies..

## **2 The relationship between regulation and the accountability model**

Since the mid-1970s, educational policies have been permeated by the use of management models that consider the instrumental of accountability as a fundamental



axis of their strategies. In accordance with the adoption of these models, the look employed for education keeps as a parameter not only the conception of accountability in terms of accountability, but also, in the spectrum of the assumed referential, of "values and technical devices put into action in the articulation of elements that integrate this concept" (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015). Therefore, the regulation and intervention of state order regarding the extension of social rights, especially with regard to education, become notorious.

In the context of the discussion about the State, Scheibe (2004, p. 188) highlights the "reduction on the one hand; on the other, the expansion of its controlling and regulating role of social systems", which is configured in a retraction and decommitment in relation to the "financing of public policies of the majority interest of society". In general, the propositions of transnational order (BARROSO, 2005) began to acquire greater valuation, considering its supranational sense of regulation, imposing changes in the role of the Welfare State regarding social welfare, as well as in the gradual displacement of its space, reserved for the "functions of coordination and regulation, but also for the replacement of centralized control by the incorporation of private and individual initiative in public management" (KRAWCZYK, 2008, p. 799).

In summary, this process brings a paradigmatic turn in the process of production and implementation of public policies, to be guided under a new perspective "[...] aligned with the conceptions of state contrary to the Keynesian vision, that is, the policies of the welfare state" (ARAÚJO; GOÉS; MIRANDA JÚNIOR, 2021, p. 10), reducing its intervention in the face of economic and social dimensions.

According to Chirinéa (2017, p. 170), the new role of the nation-state in the face of "modernity, globalization, transnationalization of capitalism, and the fiscal and structural crisis faced by the state" starts to become clear in the face of the transformations materialized by the passage from a State-Provider to a State-Regulator and Evaluator, highlighted by Afonso (2001) as a framework inducing competitiveness in the social environment. This competition is effective in education in the very processes



that permeate the educational assessment, widely visible in its assumptions, full of instrumental and mercantiled rationality, valuing highly results that can be quantified and measured (CHIRINÉA, 2017).

In the course of the interpenetration process between market and State, with the former expanding to the detriment of the social performance of the latter, tangented by reform processes of the State apparatus grounded in neoliberal and neoconservative ideals (AFONSO, 1999), substantial changes were established in the processes of State regulation as to educational systems (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2018). It is at this juncture that the practices of external evaluation are unveiled, applied on a large scale, as a key piece of strategies regarding educational policy in the last decades of the twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

Thus, assumed the centrality of evaluations, regarding the operationalization of regulation in the educational dimension, it becomes very visible the context of influence of the benchmarks of efficiency and quality, perceived in the bias of the reforms as imperatives of a process of globalization and marketization, in a predominance of the economic sphere in the state organization as to educational policy (LOUZADA; MARQUES, 2015).

The reform agenda of the principles of state management has been marked by the reformulation and rise of new evaluative strategies that encourage the taking of action against educational policies, with the insertion of the concept of accountability in the educational system in association with evaluative methods on a broad scale. In this context, the definition of public and evaluation policies still perceives a relative autonomy in relation to the entities of a Federation (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015).

This organization would configure what is conceived as a neoliberal ideological linkage to the educational context in terms of evaluative practices and policies, focusing its strategy on the accountability model and its strategic tools for the regulation and control of education. Thus, the announced process articulated a deepening in management models, understanding the need of the State in relation to accountability



towards society as a principle to be stimulated, with the propagation of democratic mechanisms of participation (SILVA; BRENNAND, 2018).

In a way inversely proportional to the lack of meaning in the Portuguese language, accountability encloses in its concept a range of aspects to be considered regarding the performance of the Brazilian State, considering the right provided in this model on the requirement of an accountability and information about a particular duty or obligation, in a practical call to give feedback on the taking of action taken with resources, or by way of exercise of powers of public power (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015), and thus, the establishment of the accountability of what was committed, in this sense, to do. As for the device of accountability for educational policy, it also highlights the urgency of evaluation, given its diagnostic function, and accountability, as a product of the exercise of power regarding the granting of powers to agents invested by public power, and the results of their actions.

Regarding regulation, this concept has emerged with a certain constancy in studies that link it to the field of study of educational public policies (BARROSO, 2005; KRAWCZYK, 2008; CHIRINÉA, 2017), especially with regard to evaluation. Instituted as a normative order, regulation has been historically legitimized as an instrument for mediating the contact between the state institution and society. Its main objective is the solution of conflicts and the functional homeostasis of the social system with processes of compensation and maintenance of a balance from compensation mechanisms to the excluding and unequal structures arising from the capitalist productive model (KRAWCZYK, 2008, p. 798). This conception of regulation leads to a "[...] social, political and economic organization, from which responsibilities and competencies of the State, the market and the society are defined"..

The regulation is conceived as an object of consecration of statutes to the intervention and control of the State, regarding the conduct of the conception, form and evaluation of public policies (BARROSO, 2005). This regulatory role is based on the





modernization proposal (AFONSO, 2013), with strong support in traditional control practices arising from a bureaucratic model of public administration.

Therefore, power dynamics oriented to different interests and values in organizations and institutions should be considered as elements circumscribed to the understanding of regulation and its materialization in regulatory processes, whether institutional, when resulting from the exercise of hierarchy, or autonomous, when arising from the actions of social actors within a given system. This regulation, when associated with the State, is the result of reforms that concatenated in a specific product, linked to neoliberal agendas, and that is embodied in the "transfer of state responsibility to the private sphere" (CHIRINÉA, 2017, p.172) control and intervention, and market self-adjustment.

Currently, educational public policies concur to the formation of governance and regulation models oriented to a post-bureaucratic agenda, which brought two referents to this context, coming from the evaluative state, and the quasi-market logic. However, these observed confluences do not allude to a mimetic process of policies (BARROSO, 2005), one notices that these policies circumscribe themselves in these models in proportionally different ways, or even develop from other focal points of departure. At the same pace, at the national level, the processes of search for the individualization of educational paths have stood out, with the choice as a possibility for the schooling of children, preeminent in the logic of the market and, in between, the contamination by external educational policies.

Moreover, the conduction and strengthening of public policies and educational control strategies have adopted this mercantile logic, which is largely disposed in the forms of evaluation of the education system on a large scale (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015; SILVA; BRENNAND, 2018). The systematic evaluation of the school, operationalized through metrics of quantitative and measurable order, is an expanding reality, with increasing adherence by networks and education systems. Among the dimensions analyzed in evaluations in Brazil, there is a strong predominance for





adherence regarding enrollment, student performance, children out of school, school dropout, and evaluation of schools as well as education systems (CERDEIRA, 2018).

In this aspect, the reformulation and rise of new evaluative strategies that give rise to action on educational policies has denoted with increasing force the insertion of the concept of accountability in the educational system in association with evaluative methods on a large scale. This process articulates a deepening in educational governance models, conceiving the need for the State in relation to accountability to society as a principle to be encouraged, with the spread of democratic mechanisms of participation (SILVA; BRENNAND, 2018).

However, it should be noted that in the wake of the production of accountability, pressures for results are induced that mobilize the co-accountability of school agents through references of social control (SANTOS, 2016) and logical administration of results (BONAMINO; SOUSA, 2012; SANTOS, 2016). In this aegis, the evaluation assumes a regulatory bias that leads to the taking of action against school quality, especially regarding the appropriation of information generated for a projection of accountability with respect to school actors (FRANCO; CALDERÓN, 2017).

It is notorious the co-accountability of managers and teachers for the performance achieved by students in the context of large-scale assessments (CERDEIRA, 2018), assuming the assumptions that the knowledge of the results obtained would result in school mobilization, as well as induction to the achievement of quality improvement via induction of popular pressure in the face of the interests of parents and community (FRANCO; CALDERÓN, 2017), alluding to the logic of accountability.

Moreover, in order to meet the assumption of quality expressed in the indexes derived from the results of evaluations, the school submits to a real race, compelled to adherence and positioning in the rankings (FERREIRA; AZEVEDO, 2022), in a classificatory system that alienates it from its true formative potential and socially referenced against the pedagogical act.



### 3 Between evaluations and the perspective of control of results in Basic Education

The evaluations in practice in the accountability model have references with conceptual foundations favorable to accountability in a more incisive way, especially with regard to results and performance, which may involve rewards and sanctions arising from the achievement of pre-established goals and objectives (FRANCO; CALDERÓN, 2017), considered elements of solid accountability policies (BONAMINO; SOUZA, 2012). These assessments, in association with the introduction of accountability that starts from material symbolic consequences, envision the encouragement and reinforcement for effective teacher participation in ensuring educational quality and student school performance. However, the use of assessment results data as a binding object for strong/solid accountability can bring risks to the school curriculum.

Among these, Bonamino and Sousa (2012, p. 383) highlight the "teaching to the test", in which the aspects of learning referring to assessment objects are privileged to the detriment of other aspects of the curricula, mainly of "non-cognitive character", or even immeasurable. This view alludes to a curricular narrowing, detrimental to the training objectives proper to the operationalization of teaching, in which the curricula are based on multiple objectives, beyond metrics and measures, or results typically related to the evaluative paradigm, which evokes a misinterpretation of the pedagogical making in the context of evaluation (BONAMINO; SOUSA, 2012; CERDEIRA, 2018).

As Cerdeira (2018, p. 618) points out, one cannot deny or omit the negative particularities arising from assessment, especially of second and third generation, cited by the author as "narrowing the curriculum; focus on the prize; selection of the 'best', students and exclusion of the 'worst'; pedagogical investment in the 'best students'; focus on training for the test and not on learning; fraud etc."

In this sense, the anomalies and consequences arising from the misuse of assessment are anchored not only in contextual factors presented in the



instrumentalization of performance monitoring and quality - such as the lack of perception of subjectivities of the composition of schools and education networks -, but also in the ignorance of the pedagogical potential of the data produced, often as a result of failure in the implementation of evaluation policies. In this way, the conception of evaluation as an element of a larger conceptual model, which evokes accountability and responsibility, when treated as a tool to serve the agenda of the commodification of education, can be effective as a reinforcement of the optics of social control and monitoring.

Although the improvement of evaluation and its metrics in the face of accountability processes can stimulate advances and positive effects in the dynamics of school management, such as the expansion of collective work, the improvement of learning in a continuous interim, and especially in the equity of conditions of educational access to different groups in the school, one cannot omit the negative effects of considering the results obtained by accountability processes in an ordinary context, without major qualitative concerns about the method and its application (BROOKE; CUNHA, 2011).

The standardization advocated by standardized tests, widely common in evaluation processes and accountability of schools for the establishment of performance standards, and immediate sanctions or rewards, can give rise to the absence of framing cultural and ethical factors that provide for democratic processes and the safeguarding of fundamental rights (AFONSO, 2009a; SCHNEIDER, 2017). This process discredits the social function of the accountability context, with ambivalent consequences, especially in political and social contexts ruled by segregatory or non-democratic elements. In this sense, Afonso (2009a, p. 16) considers that the worst scenario at this juncture would be, "without a doubt, the one that concerns accountability without evaluation and accountability".

Cerdeira (2018) points out, as the main hypothesis for such an anomaly of the accountability and accountability process, the absence of consideration of ethical-political and environmental factors as limiting factors for the achievement of results in certain



school contexts, mitigating the effectiveness of the control of dimensions such as quality in education and pedagogical purposes. Based on this principle, it is considered that the accountability system, genuinely advanced in democratic terms, makes the processes of evaluation, accountability and responsibility (sanctions or rewards) with guidance to equipotent articulations, firm in angular values such as transparency, right to information and citizen participation (AFONSO, 2009b)..

These reflections corroborate the need to reorient the delineation of the concept of accountability to the social practice, envisioning a participatory construction based on the analysis of the educational context and the factors that permeate it. Moreover, this directive is urgent for the establishment of an evaluation that considers the impact of the realities and experiences of the school environment and its subjectivities, without associations to merely instrumental and symbolic perspectives or control per se, but with a scope aligned to the full development of pedagogical action (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015; CERDEIRA, 2018).

The context in which policies are implemented should be subject to interpretation and, in between, adaptations and recreations that comport the complex logic of the educational management system. Thus, significant transformations can be produced in the original policies, contemplating an understanding of the dynamics of the school environment without dichotomous references typical of alienations arising from large-scale assessments (SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015).

#### **4 Final considerations**

The concept of regulation has materialized in the field of education, especially from the tensions between educational management, autonomy, and the centrality of public policies in the face of educational reforms that contemplated state intervention and control.

In this sense, in the last three decades of the twentieth century, the accountability tools have become key elements regarding the need to demand transparency and



effectiveness of the actions of elected officials and public agents about the use of resources and, in this same sense, the ability of citizens to make responsible for their actions these subjects invested by public power (AFONSO, 2009a; SCHNEIDER; NARDI, 2015).

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It is necessary to establish that the evaluative practice established with the focus on correcting asymmetries and promoting school governance, makes possible its role as an institute of regulation, and policy that provides popular participation in management processes, the use and appropriation of educational data resulting from assessments for management and accountability of solidarity among school agents. Regarding accountability, even being commonly linked to accountability and stipulation of sanctions, it also falls in the consideration of argumentation and justification, opposed to a unilateral control and absence of voice (SCHEDLER, 2004), with emphasis on the construction of open and transparent relationship between the subjects.

These processes can be valuable for the development of management strategies that involve the planning and construction of public policies that envision the continuous improvement of learning. However, it is necessary to point out that in its signification they involve the meaning of precepts characteristic of the market, to which the State has effected the incorporation of the mercantile logic raised by the introduction of management models proper of the private sphere, with orientation to results and products, in the sphere of the public domain (AFONSO, 2009b; SCHNEIDER and NARDI, 2015).

It is essential to emphasize that the modernization theory and its postulates make use of an understanding of false equity among educational systems, in discourses that deal with education at paired levels, which in this view, would make it possible for national and international comparative evaluations to suggest which deficits to remedy, and guidelines to take regarding the construction or reconfiguration of policies. However,



the adoption of the concepts of effectiveness and efficiency pressing in this rationality leads to the establishment of policies, which, in short, are distinct from social logic.

In this context, it demands attention the organization and emergence of programs, projects, and models of intervention in education as products of public policies oriented to practices that enhance the hegemonic social and economic reproduction, and sharpen the contradictions between the effectiveness of popular participation in its demands for participation and accountability and the co-responsibility of school subjects that political actors offer in political propositions for educational quality.

The adoption of a regulatory perspective outlined in strengthening the monitoring and social control expressed, which, in short, corroborates the fructification of the logics of accountability and the importation of its partial elements to the field of education, brings logics of exclusion and inequalities, reinforced by the evaluation in the process of "cultural and scientific standardization" expressed by Afonso (2013), in a clear induction resulting from the centralizing character of large-scale evaluations.

As a result, the school and education proliferate as a private good, with the displacement of its function and social value to an aegis of economic value, putting knowledge at the service of market utilitarianism, and the school as a supplier of human capital in an optic in which the educational offer is deduced as a service, in the merchandised perspective.

Regarding the national evaluation policy, it is clear that the educational evaluations and their products have acquired their own specificities and characteristics, which has not necessarily made them free of resistance or criticism. On one hand, from the perspective of the potential of the evaluations, there is the understanding of their inductive character of school mobilization in favor of learning as a positive factor. On the other hand, it engenders anomalies in the pedagogical action, either in the sense of selecting students, narrowing the curriculum, and focusing on learning, to the detriment of



the complexity of the pedagogical act and the need to maintain its dialogical, emancipating, and transforming perspective.

Furthermore, the practice of comparing the results of educational units has introduced interfering elements in the praxis of schools, in the organization of processes, such as planning and formulation of objectives. The main effects have been: the modulation of pedagogical action according to the performative quality induced by the indexes; responsiveness linked to standardization and evaluation results, focusing on the interests of parents and community as participants of the process mediated by accountability, which besides the discursive bias, also has a coercive and punitive dimension on the institutions and school actors.

Given the complexity of the exposed question, which brings in itself, beyond a dichotomous perspective, complex relations coined in the experiences concerning the materialization of the evaluation policies and its role towards educational regulation, more studies are necessary to explore these relations in a larger extent, connecting them with the perceptions of the actors invested in the formulation and implementation of the evaluation policies.

Nevertheless, it is clear that social participation, as an inseparable element of democratic management, must permeate the decisions to be made regarding the political construction of regulation and evaluation processes, not only being tied to a path of listening and discussion for its approval, but also in order to become effective and substantial. As long as "those who will benefit most from a democratization of the school can actively participate in decisions about its goals and ways to achieve them (PARO et al., 1988, p. 228), it will be possible to go beyond the dichotomies between regulation and evaluation in a perspective of social control and monitoring, making effective the democratic and social perspective in the management of Basic Education..

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