

Discourses and crossings in the evaluative practices in the daily life of teachers

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Abstract

This article is inserted in the field of discussions about evaluation practices and aimed to analyze the discursive constructions that weave the evaluation practices of teachers in the hinterland of Pernambuco. We used as theoretical support authors such as Marinho, Leite and Fernandes (2014), Lopes (2018) and Costa e Silva (2021), for the understanding of evaluation as a space for negotiation of meanings, not having a fixed meaning, but precarious and provisional. Data analysis was performed from the theoretical and methodological perspective of Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (2015). Thus, from the teachers' speeches, we identified that the evaluative practices have a fluctuation of meanings and are crossed by the discursive constructions of the external evaluation policies, teacher training, the common national bases, and the regulation of the teaching work.

Keywords: Evaluation. Evaluation Practices. Discourse Theory.

Discursos e atravessamentos nas práticas avaliativas no cotidiano dos professores

Resumo

Este artigo se insere no campo de discussões sobre as práticas avaliativas e objetivou analisar as construções discursivas que tecem as práticas avaliativas de professores do agreste pernambucano. Utilizamos como aporte teórico autores como Marinho, Leite e Fernandes (2014), Lopes (2018) e Costa e Silva (2021), para a compreensão da avaliação enquanto um espaço de negociação de significações, não possuindo um sentido fixo, mas precário e provisório. A análise dos dados foi realizada a partir da perspectiva teórico-metodológica da Teoria do Discurso de Laclau e Mouffe (2015). Assim, a partir dos discursos das professoras, identificamos que as práticas avaliativas possuem uma flutuação de sentidos e são atravessadas pelas construções discursivas das políticas de avaliação externa, da formação docente, das bases nacionais comuns e da regulação do trabalho docente.

Palavras-chave: Avaliação. Práticas Avaliativas. Teoria do Discurso.



1 Introduction

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The field of studies on evaluation and evaluative practices is constituted as a space of investigation and interest in several researches in the educational field¹. In this line, according to Magalhães et. al (2018), the evaluation, despite being a classic theme in educational studies, tends to become more complex according to social, political, and educational changes, and the new demands and challenges of everyday school life.

Thus, in everyday school life, assessment practices "[...] have undergone significant changes due to the evolution of educational policies and the roles assigned to the curriculum and school education" (MARINHO; LEITE; FERNANDES, 2014, p. 151), causing evaluation to be assigned different meanings according to the discursive constructions that permeate these practices.

Along these lines, Marinho, Leite, and Fernandes (2014), highlight some evaluative meanings, which fluctuate between evaluation as a form of 'measurement', often used in tests, as a way to measure intelligence and skills, and evaluation as 'description', not only focused on the results, but as a way to describe how students' learning occurs. And finally, assessment as a process of 'negotiation and construction', in this sense assessment has a formative understanding.

From this understanding, we understand evaluation as a space of dispute for its meaning, in which the evaluative meaning is attributed in different ways and in the most diverse contexts. However, all meaning can be temporarily stabilized, even if in a precarious and contingent way.

The curricular-evaluative policies try to hegemonize the meaning for the evaluation based on the measurement of learning as results. In this sense, the assessment is presented as regulation of the teaching work, since it will be charged in external assessments, the content prescribed in the basic curriculum document, the BNCC, and the teacher must account for this content so that students achieve good rates in the assessments.





Thus, according to Costa and Silva (2021), the regulation of these agents has the "intentionality to interfere directly in the teaching work stimulating them to review and readjust their practices", so through the standardization of assessment methods in large scale, the teachers' practices are also subject to this standardization, and the planning is performed according to what is charged in the tests. This is because "assessment assumes a structuring role of the teaching-learning processes and the work of teachers and students" (MARINHO; LEITE; FERNANDES, 2014, p. 1).

Based on the assumption that these discursivities are present in the evaluation practices of these teachers, this study is relevant because it allows an investigation on the evaluation practices of teachers in the western region of Pernambuco, regarding the discourses that are present in the teachers' practices and weave senses for the understanding of the evaluative senses.

Given this scenario, the question emerges: What are the discourses that cross and weave the evaluative practices of teachers of the early years of elementary education in the agreste of Pernambuco? And the objective is to analyze the discursive constructions that weave the evaluative practices of teachers in the rural area of Pernambuco, which unfolds in two other specific objectives: Identify in the discursive constructions the meanings attributed to the evaluative practices; and identify the discourses that influence the daily weaving of evaluative practices.

2 Methodology

We took as spatial cutout the region of Agreste of the state of Pernambuco, more specifically, the municipality of Caruaru and surrounding cities. In it, we selected the public municipal schools and teachers of the initial years of elementary school who are in training in the Pedagogy course of the Federal University of Pernambuco, Agreste Academic Center (CAA), as well as those who are graduates of the mentioned institution.





Two tools were used for the identification of research participants. In the first step, we developed a questionnaire on the, that was made available to all students from Pedagogy course at UFPE/CAA, during a period of two months. We identified two student-teachers, Ana, a 7th period student-teacher working under a contract in São Benedito do Sul, and Eva, a 6th period student-teacher working under an internship contract in Caruaru. Both work in the 5th grade of the Elementary School in their respective schools.

To identify graduates of the pedagogy course, the search occurred through social media and communication platforms, where we found the teacher Maria, who works under contract in the public school system of the city of Brejo da Madre de Deus, in the 2nd and 3rd years of elementary school.

To broaden the understanding about the existing discourses in the field of evaluation, we sought the meanings given to this axis by different authors in the educational field. Thus, we selected the scientific productions published in the journals "Currículo sem Fronteiras", "e-Curriculum", "Roteiro" and "Práxis Educativa", from the years 2020 and 2021, where we identified 10 productions that fall under the theme.

The hegemonic meanings of evaluation identified by the authors in their research define it as an instrument used to improve the quality of education according to the results obtained (SANT'OVAIA; COSTA, 2020; CAMPOS, 2020).

We took as theoretical and methodological perspective the Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory (2015) for the analysis of the teachers' speeches, because we understand that it is a theory of the political, i.e., the disruptive potential existing in social phenomena, beyond institutions (MENDONÇA; LINHARES, 2021). In this sense, social phenomena of the same nature can be placed in political dispute in an attempt to hegemonize a desired meaning, which is "provisional, precarious and contingent." (LOPES, 2018, p. 138).

Furthermore, discourse theory understands discourse not only as speech, but also as articulations made towards a universalization desired by a social group, as stated by Burity (2014, p. 66)





Thus, the phenomena are invested and crossed by distinct discursive formations. (...)discourse is a complex unit of words and actions, of explicit and implicit elements, of conscious and unconscious strategies. It is an inseparable part of the social ontology of objects.

Thus, we used as instruments of data collection the questionnaire, participant observation and semi-structured interview, where we could identify in the teachers' speeches the constructions and ways of organizing the school routine, as well as the aspects that are decisive for the mobilization of their evaluative practices.

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3 Results and Discussion

From the speeches of the research collaborating teachers, we notice that the meanings attributed to the evaluation transit between a formative evaluation and an evaluation that is crossed by the impositions of external evaluations and management regulation on the teaching work.

Thus, the meanings that focus on the pedagogical and formative character are present in the discourse of teacher Maria, when she states that "Assessment ends up being formative, there is no specific moment and no dates, no fixed instrument to be used to measure it." (MARIA, INTERVIEW, 12/07/2022), as well as in teacher Eva's statement: "The evaluation is procedural, that is, it does not stick only to the written test, it allows other issues to be evaluated in the learning process of the students." (EVA, QUESTIONNAIRE, 10/02/2022).

Given these speeches, we can identify that the teachers approach the meaning of evaluation as "negotiation and construction" pointed out by Marinho, Leite and Fernandes (2014), where the goal is the construction of a better teaching-learning and not a classification based on efficiency results.

Also in this sense, teacher Eva emphasizes that assessment is understood "as a process of identifying which difficulties students have and which have already been overcome." (EVA, QUESTIONNAIRE, 10/02/2022) Thus, evaluation is understood through the sense of "evaluation as a description" (MARINHO; LEITE; FERNANDES,





2014), focusing on describing how students learn and the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process.

Moreover, it was possible to notice in Ana's discourse that the meanings understood of evaluation go through opposing understandings regarding the procedural and formative sense and the sense based on efficiency and search for results. When enunciating in her speech that,

"I had a different view of evaluation before I took the evaluation of learning course, and then, from that point on, evaluation for me is a process, according to what Mendez tells us, it is a process, it is knowledge and it must be procedural, a process, evaluation has to be that." (ANA, ENTREVISTA, 20/06/2022)

We noticed that the teacher mobilizes elements from her training and that the evaluative meaning understood by her was influenced by the discursive elements of her training experience. In this sense, Tardif (2008) states that teacher training should ensure a basis for specialized pedagogical knowledge.

However, teacher Ana points out that the evaluation practices are crossed by the external evaluation, which several times contradicts the meaning she attributed to the evaluation, as we can see in the following speeches:

"When we are in the classroom and see the issue of external evaluations, it is a shock for us, because if the evaluation is a process, how can an external evaluation, an evaluation in which the child has to read and mark an "x", how can that measure the child's knowledge? "

"The system they impose here, we have, every month, a follow-up form for the students, with the program that we work with here in our municipality, which is the Early Years Management Program, and every month we are there, evaluating the students through these forms, and also through the bimonthly evaluations. But this is what the system imposes on us." (ANA, ENTREVISTA, 20/06/2022)

Through external evaluations, we can identify a new evaluative meaning, highlighted by Ana, the evaluation as a tool to "measure knowledge", highlighted by Marinho, Leite, and Fernandes (2014), as the evaluation as 'measurement'. In addition, Ana states that she evaluates her students according to what the "system imposes", that is, her evaluative practices follow the prescriptions of the programs that the municipal office uses.





In this perspective, Oliveira (2021) states that this is a form of regulation of the teaching work, because it happens when "establishing evaluation goals, through pedagogical intervention programs in order to ensure the success of education and its much desired quality" (OLIVEIRA, 2021, p. 15). Thus, we observe that the evaluation, the curriculum and the teaching work are in constant relation, the teacher turns to these two axes to organize, perform and justify their work.

Thus, we understand that external evaluations have a strong influence on curriculum policies of schools and, consequently, on the evaluation of student learning. Costa and Silva (2021) state that large-scale evaluations guide the sense of quality of education in educational policies, which produces effects such as regulation and loss of teaching autonomy.

The teachers' speeches also reveal that the external evaluation policies become an obstacle to the implementation of other ways of evaluating, as teacher Eva states that "the need to work on external workbooks that have deadlines to be answered and the external evaluations that prevent the continuity of the lesson planning" (EVA, QUESTIONNAIRE, 10/02/2022) are her main difficulties in daily school life. Still, teacher Ana points out that the "main challenges encountered during the school year is to adapt the content to the learning levels of each child" (ANA, ENTREVISTA, 20/06/2022).

Considering that the school policies of the institutions where Ana, Maria and Eva teach are guided by the Common National Curricular Base (BNCC), we found that the predominance of the use of tests as assessment tools is a result of the regulatory framework of external assessments, as stated by the teacher Maria in the excerpt: "Here, we work in the cycle process, so, that measuring assessment, right, that assessment tool, only the test at the end of the year, to fail or approve. (MARIA, INTERVIEW, JULY 12, 2002). In this sense, the teacher's speeches are aligned to Costa de Silva's (2021) notes, when they state that the evaluation-state instituted in Brazil is characterized by the standardization of evaluation practices to promote educational quality.

In contrast, although external evaluation policies are the main regulator of evaluative practices in the teachers' educational contexts, they claim that they also They





use other assessment routes, aiming to overcome the limitation caused by using tests as the only way to assess. In this way, we could identify that the teachers also use the observation of the students' development and participation, group activities, and individual activities in the composition of the grades (ANA; EVA; MARIA, QUESTIONÁRIO, 2022).

In this line, Campos (2020), when conducting a study on evaluation policies, states that teachers in the municipal education network create strategies to overcome the proclaimed crisis of education and legal determinations. Thus, the new evaluative forms that emerge in the context of the teachers participating in the research also present themselves as a confrontation with the current curricular and evaluative policies, recovering the teachers' autonomy in the teaching-learning processes in the daily classroom.

4 Final considerations

When we resume the research problem, that is, what are the discourses that cross and weave the evaluation practices of teachers of the initial years of elementary education in the agreste of Pernambuco, it was possible to identify, from the teachers' speeches, the meanings of evaluation and how these meanings are reproduced in the practices of teachers of the initial years of elementary education. We observed that the evaluation for the teachers is constituted throughout the teaching-learning process, being continuous and formative, however, some discursivities cross these practices, such as external evaluations, the imposition of teaching-learning programs, the discursive constructions in the training process, and also the regulation of the management in face of the curricular-evaluative practices.

Thus, it is evident that the meanings of evaluation are crossed by several discursive constructions, which promote evaluation a new meaning and a new evaluative practice. In addition, these crossings become limitations to the teachers' evaluative





practices in everyday school life, restricting them to the application of objective tests, which become a training for the external tests held annually.

We also noticed that evaluative policies guide teaching practices, and teachers present themselves as curricular decision-makers to the extent that they realize other possibilities to evaluate, considering aspects that cannot be seen in the results of objective and external tests. In this way, the meanings for evaluation that are aligned with the conceptions constructed during the initial formation of the female teachers become the possibilities of reinvention in the evaluation processes in the educational institutions.

Finally, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory allows us to understand the discourses as speech and action, which mobilize the hegemonization of meanings from the articulation of demands. In this way, in the teachers' speeches emerges the political dispute in which the evaluation is centered as an empty signifier.

We emphasize that the hegemonization of the meaning of evaluation as a process that makes it possible to evaluate teaching-learning, considering the numerous complexities that permeate the construction of knowledge, is possible through the struggle for the reconstruction of political processes and external evaluation policies, enabling the hegemonization of new meanings.

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