

Brazilian Educational System under Attack: The Reforms Proposed After the 2016 Coup and Their Sociological Contexts

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Abstract

In mid-2016, in Brazil, many political changes are made after the deposition of President Dilma Rousseff from the presidency of the federal republic. Among these changes, initiated by the President of the Republic Michel Temer and sustained by his successor, Jair Bolsonaro, are the changes in the area of Education, placing it more and more on the path of the established neoliberal agenda. Many of the proposed changes, as well as the way they are carried out, had already been addressed by several authors in the field of Education and Sociology. Thus, this article proposed to explain the non-explicit political interests with these reforms based on a specific literature. In the end, the model of making the educational system for maintaining the neoliberal agenda is described, as well as possible means of weakening this system.

Keywords: educational system, neoliberal agenda, political interests

1. Introduction

In Brazil, the educational public system has been facing some huge changes since 2016, when President Dilma Rousseff underwent an impeachment process and her place was taken by Michel Temer. Expected to comply with a neoliberal agenda, Temer's reforms were broad, encompassing social security, social assistance programs, reduction of labor rights and reforms in the educational system (Lima & Maciel, 2018).

As Dilma loses support in the Chamber of Deputies, Temer's articulation begins by strengthening relations with her already allies in the group named "centrão", the large mass of deputies with greater numerical articulation for the sanction or veto of laws. This causes his government to be automatically marked by greater participation of market interests, a characteristic sustained by his successor, Jair Bolsonaro.

When dealing with educational management, the governments Temer and Bolsonaro are characterized by a characteristic of modernization of the system by the

withdrawal of political-ideological criticism in the teaching and learning processes in primary and secondary schools – then, the commitment to put the educational system on the *Status Quo*.

Based on these two approaches, as well as the need to understand the real meaning of the reforms, mostly to the Education area, this article aims to discuss its main proposals for education and reforms through a sociological perspective, in which it is expected the comprehension of the non-explicit arguments, kept between the lines, as the real agents benefited by their changes.

2. Methodological procedures

To explain the phenomena taken as objects of study it was chosen the deductive method. “In a deductive argument, the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises” (Jarrard, 2001, p. 73). The education reform laws will be described in a period of five years (2016-2020), during Temer and Bolsonaro Government. A critical discussion of these laws will be established based on the bibliography of theories previously raised by authors dedicated to this theme. The criterion taken for the selection of these authors is based on three concomitant characteristics: Criticism of the influence of the neoliberal agenda in Brazilian education; the opposition to the supposed neutrality in the educational system; and the defense of a libertarian, popular and anti-classist educational system.

3. Education reforms from 2016 to 2020

It is not possible to talk about the main criticisms of the post-Dilma Rousseff administration without commenting on her main results as President of the Federative Republic of Brazil (jan. 2011 – ago. 2016). First, in her re-election, her campaign adhered to the slogan “Brasil, Pátria Educadora” [eng.] “Brazil, Educating Homeland” (Lockmann & Machado, 2018), however, over the years, this has accumulated unsatisfactory results in the management of Education, according to international meters such as the Program for International Student Assessment – PISA (Araújo & Tenório, 2017). Anyway, some authors like Araújo and Tenório disagree with the use of PISA as a measurer of the results achieved over the years in education, considering other meters that for many managers would have greater credibility, meantime, they do not deny that the PISA results made up a considerable part of the criticism of Dilma’s management in Education, adding to less formal justifications for the August 2016 Coup that took her out of the power.

When Michel Temer assumed the presidency of the republic, on August 31, 2016, his speech was one of conciliation with institutions, especially business ones, and throughout his government, his management in education proved to be even clearer his commitment to a neoliberal agenda.

The first major proposal of the Temer Government for Education was the already amended law 13.415 / 2017, which modifies Law 11.684 / 2008 of the Basic

Guidelines in National Education, of 1996, offering the possibility of distributing the load of high school subjects according to with the life project of each student, and also the option of vocational education. This new approach indicates a tendency of the poorest classes to technical education, while the group of more fortunate students follow disciplines of intellectual formation and preparatory for the entrance to the university (Ramos & Heinsfeld, 2018).

In the long run, the tendency of poorer students to choose technical education, in the search for an immediate improvement in life, may exacerbate Brazilian social inequalities, while students with better living conditions will be able to continue with their university entrance projects with less competition, and having greater and better professional opportunities through university training (Silva & Melo, 2018).

The reforms made during the Temer Government for Education, such as the “new high school” (whose implementation is scheduled for 2021), follow an agenda of numerous neoliberal reforms, such as labor reform, and the social security reform, sanctioned by his successor. These two reforms, especially labor reforms, may explain a lot about the role of the working class, as teaching workers, in the neo-liberal agenda of Michel Temer and Jair Bolsonaro.

One of the main characteristics of the 2017 labor reform is the labor outsourcing, responsible for making the formal contracts more flexible, which would immediately generate an increase in informality in Brazil. Begun as Bill 4.302 / 1998, still under the liberal Government Fernando Henrique Cardoso (1995-2002), this project becomes part of the set of reforms of labor laws in Brazil in 2017 and its main justification was the reduction of contractual obligations in due to the greater capacity to do them in the short term, thus reducing unemployment rates (Alves, 2018).

When this project reaches the Brazilian professors, the regressive transformations are evident. Fernandes (2017, p. 237) remembers that “a school may now choose not to have any direct employees and to hire an outsourcing company to provide the teachers, inspectors, receptionists, doormen and cleaners necessary to render the services”. This phenomenon, although it has become clearer in the private education system, has also intensified in the public sector. Teachers in several states and municipalities have been submitted to intermittent contract laws in order to reduce their rights and school obligations.

Contrary to what is proposed, Michel Temer’s reforms fail to create jobs, and even for informal work and outsourced work, there is a high intensification of precarious work. The Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics reports an increase in unemployment from 10.2% (before the August 2016 Coup) to 13.3%, a result achieved in the same year of the reform. To a greater extent, it also reduced the popular participation in the national economy – the consumer and services market (Silva, 2019).

The teaching class did not escape the rule. The increase in an already striking informality, along with the subjectivity and precariousness of work, made teachers, as a large portion of the working class in general, search for new ways of obtaining income, not being able to give exclusive dedication to teaching.

Not trying the re-election, Temer's party, MDB, puts his Economy Minister, Henrique Meirelles, in the electoral dispute for the presidency of the federal republic, which due to the increase in corruption rates and Temer's low popularity, from the beginning did not reach the expectations of the party, fulfilling only an electoral rite. Beyond Temer, pushing his same neoliberal economic agenda, however, with an ultra-conservative speech, Jair Bolsonaro gains popularity, promising to continue the reforms of Temer, also emphasizing a supposed commitment to fight corruption.

Discontent with the Bolsonaro government plummets in his first year as President of the Republic. Although with the promise of diversifying from other experiences, the economy declines, as does popular participation in the economy. In addition to this, the continuity of the alliances with "Centrão" (which in 2018 he promised it wouldn't happen) and the use of power to shield his family from corruption investigations further undermines his popularity during 2019, a factor that is enhanced by the lack of effective measures to fight the Coronavirus pandemic in Brazil in 2020 due higher inflation rates in basic food products and higher unemployment rates.

Like many of the ministers making up Bolsonaro's team, the Education portfolio has not escaped the rule of his main criteria of choice: less technical, more conservative ideology. His prime minister, Colombian Ricardo Vélez Rodríguez, appointed by the president's mentor, Olavo de Carvalho, lasted only three months and seven days in office, due to strong popular rejection by the lack of projects for the area.

Then, Abraham Weintraub takes the place; he accentuated the conservative ideology in the ministry, often taking public anti-diplomatic positions, causing problems even with the Chinese government. Weintraub's antiestablishment positions have caused problems when at a ministerial meeting he suggested the arrest of members of the Brazilian Supreme Court. Such an event causes his ruin in the ministry, which leads him to resign.

After a series of failures in the attempt to hire a new minister, caught for lying about a doctorate degree and a postdoctoral job in his academic curriculum, the government makes an agreement with the professor and evangelical pastor Milton Ribeiro, known for reduction projects budget for education, as well as for the defense of retrograde disciplinary methodologies, such as physical punishment (Reuters, 2020).

Among the characteristics of Temer and Bolsonaro in the management of Education, there are opportunities for defenders of the neoliberal agenda in two aspects: defenders of a supposed freedom, which involves their speeches but disregards historical trends; and conservatives, adepts of retrograde disciplinary methods and

defenders of anti-scientific conspiracy theories. However, in a truly perspective of Education for freedom, the antagonism of the discussion must be taken to another field. There is no real antagonism between advocates on the same agenda just because they disagree on how it should be implemented. The real antagonism is in questioning the neoliberal agenda in Education, as it will be discussed in the next topic.

4. Criticism through bibliography

As already mentioned, it is important to remember that the choice of authors to carry out the criticism is based on their defended pedagogical political thoughts and educational projects. The analyzed phenomena of the last five years of public education management is based on the thinking of these authors, whose bibliographies had their first editions years and decades before the analyzed period.

To understand the increasingly clear alternative for a neoliberal educational system, it is necessary to understand that education has a social function. The directions that a society takes are given by its intellectual formation, by the food of its desires to maintain the current socioeconomic system or by a real change. The sociologist Paulo Meksenas (2014) analyzes the education from three perspectives: (I) traditional; (II) renovated / reformist and (III) transformative.

The first perspective, the traditional one, can be said to have already been overcome in Brazilian territory, as well as in many countries. The traditional perspective consists of the belief of the teacher as a full holder of knowledge, which is disseminated through a system metaphorically understood by “deposits”; in which students apt to this teaching system learn, while others, who for any reason are not able, fail.

The reformist perspective comes as critical to the traditional one, since it starts to consider inclusion in the teaching process, as well as decentralizing the participation of the teacher in the classroom and valuing the exchange of knowledge with students. This process, addicted to the successful social inclusion, showed satisfactory results in the intellectual development of the participants. In this way, the reformist current of education has persisted since the first decades of the 20th century to the nowadays. However, the reformist approach has not proposed solutions to the problems caused by the classist domination structures through an education that raises awareness of these problems, and this concern leads thinkers to frame the perspective for a transformative educational system (Meksenas, 2014).

It is important to clarify that the reformist perspective is not completely linked to criticism of the traditional educational system. In fact, there is an opening where pedagogical distortions are perceived to be corrected, as well as positive aspects to be improved. However, according to Durkheimian thinking, there is a direct relationship between reforming educational structures and reforming the capitalist system, as something that is not supposed to have reached a full state, but must be

improved and maintained. Education, therefore, includes society to adapt to this system, which is expected to be improved and more inclusive.

This is because, for Durkheim, the system is established before a conception of the social function of education is established on it, that is, education adapts the human being to have a better fraternal relationship, to improve their social capital. His vision is better associated with the reformist perspective because he believes that education should be approached in a creative and as customized way as possible to include and adapt the individual to the current socio-economic system, not exactly extolling the current system, but by setting about the idea that education must be neutral (Durkheim, 1978).

When thinkers, philosophers, sociologists and pedagogues around the world appropriate the Marxist criticism to the system of production and exploitation of work and, in general, to the capitalist system, they realize that there's a possibility of inserting the revolutionary thinking in the educational action, thus making possible, the conception of an educational methodology for the formation of critical human beings, capable of using it to question their socioeconomic conditions of exploitation, discovering themselves in their roles in the gears of the system and acquiring the tools to change it (Meksenas, 2014).

Naturally, the liberation of the oppressed class is not suitable for the oppressive class, once it improves its mechanisms of domination. Since in a scenario of "modernity", "friendship", "fraternity", domination will not occur through the use of brute force, the mechanisms of ruling society maintains its agenda by promoting a fatalistic discourse. This discourse causes the working classes to take fatalism and believe that the social context cannot be changed, but that they can change their personal concerns and adapt to the system, dream of personal fulfillment, with a better position in the company, with better wages and better working conditions. In this way, the working class becomes more competitive, working for the enforcement and maintenance of the classist system (Freire, 2019).

Therefore, pedagogy in the reformist perspective of the new school, even if inclusive, will never give the people the tools to question the structures of domination, since it presents itself as neutral or wide open its true objectives, it will be a tool of the ruling society. From this perspective, inclusion is not necessarily a good thing. If the ruling society appropriates an effective educational method to distribute it to the population and indoctrinate it to serve class interests, from conditioning conscience to production by individual achievement and not by the liberation of the working classes, this perspective, in the transforming pedagogy, to free the oppressed masses, must be combated. "The fatalistic, immobilizing ideology that animates neoliberal discourse is loose in the world. With an air of postmodernity, he insists on convincing us that we cannot do anything against the social reality that, from historical and cultural, becomes or becomes an 'almost natural'" (Freire, 2019b, p. 21, free translation).

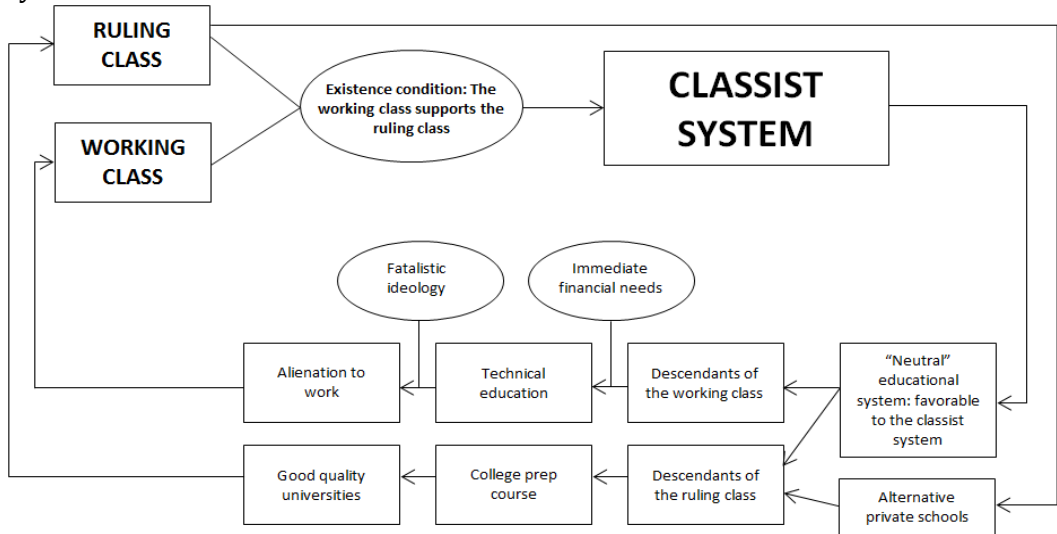
The dialogue in which the direction of education is taken only by agents interested in fulfilling the neoliberal agenda is not accepted as democratic. Be adept at the perspective of traditional education, be adept at including peoples, in the end, education will not be being discussed as a good that has a social function. The neoliberal agenda, no matter its sub-ideologies, will always be the object that education from a transformative perspective will oppose, regardless of the idea of freedom sold as anesthesia to the oppressed class.

From the perspective of transformative education, the educational process must be initiated by popular means, in order to reach in its conception the oppressed classes and through them, as a critique of formal educational structures, managed by neoliberal agents. In other words, a change in educational structures towards truly emancipatory education is not expected to start with the formal education system, but to reach it by the popular masses aware of their role and, finally, liberate the oppressed masses in a more generalized way (Paludo, 2015).

Criticism and the insertion of the transformative education model in the formal education system do not occur by peaceful means. The ruling classes are well aware of the potential of their antagonists and also know that the mere sale of individualistic dreams is not always enough. The strategy adopted by the ruling classes, then, is to strengthen their discourse in the school environment, offering an alienating education (Mészáros, 2008). In this way, the reproduction of the ruling ideology in the work environment can take place without major difficulties, since the oppressed classes are already indoctrinated to arrive and remain in that environment resolute that any proposal outside the classist system must be taken as a fearful one subversion.

These propositions allow us to design a device that is easy to understand the importance of reformist education and the adhesion of the poorest students inserted in the context of Michel Temer's New High School to adhere to technical education, as well as the reinforcement given by Bolsonaro's explicit conservative speech for the perpetuation of that system.

Board 1: The role of the reformist school’s neutral educational system in the classist system



Source: made by the author through the interpretation of the bibliography (2021).

5. Discussion

This flowchart, elaborated through the literary analysis, explains how the classist system produces the “neutral” educational system, separating the classes with the proposal of technical education (Temer) instead of a greater dedication to the college prep course in high school, a choice that it will usually come by working-class descendants (larger masses) to suppress the immediate financial needs. Then, the fatalistic ideology (characteristic of the Bolsonaro’s government) indoctrinates them to accept the state of exploitation as something natural and fair.

On the other side, the heirs of the ruling class, even though they pass through the same educational system, are absolutely able to opt for college prep education, which will help them to gain their places in good universities, but in this situation, with less competition and guaranteeing their prerogative conditions in the ruling class as well.

Eventually, some more elitist groups in the ruling class may send their children to alternative educational systems; however, the destination will be the same for them. Since the masses will tend to focus on standardized formal education schools, it is these schools that the class system will try to influence.

Naturally, there is a question about how to meet the immediate financial needs of the working class if eventually their heirs opt for university preparatory education, which would automatically require another four to six years of university studies and then more for a financial stabilization. In this case, it is up to the population to demand the implementation or continuity of public social assistance policies to guarantee their

right to study, according to the Brazilian Federal Constitution – Chapter III, art. 205-217 (Brasil, 2011). Although the population may demand their rights, the fatalistic discourse and alienation that will socially exclude anyone who is against the *Status Quo* are very effective.

One of the great achievements of Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party) in Brazil was the expansion of access to the university by the neediest populations, which also involved a series of security measures for maintaining and continuing studies, however, there was no structural reform in the system (Aguilar, 2016). Educational system so that it could cause a great deal of damage to the classist system. Anyway, maybe a sudden radical change could not be expected yet. It is necessary to bring back the democratization of access to university, as a hopeful measure to weaken the fatalistic discourse and social alienation.

Conclusions

Based on the research, it was possible to explain at what points there was a regression of the Temer's and Bolsonaro's governments in the Brazilian educational system, as well as their foundations in sociology. They did not follow a revolutionary period, even though their predecessors slightly affected the interests of an already established neoliberal agenda.

Even though the new agents at the top of the executive branch have decimated the discourse on the importance of the entry of the poorest population to higher education, society still has legal provisions, which must be charged and whose neutralization of access by the fatalistic discourse, which now can start directly in the New High School, scheduled for implementation in 2021.

As the freedom of professorship to disseminate critical thinking in the school environment is still safeguarded, the antagonism of teachers to the system of class separation is also fundamentally important for a possible and gradual dismantling of the neoliberal agenda at school.

The situation experienced in Brazil, not being unprecedented, can be a good tool for analyzing similar approaches, whose discourse by public administrators shows a tendency to signal the modernization of the educational system, but which ends up not going beyond the script elaborated by the neoliberal agenda.

The maintenance of the classist model in the neoliberal educational system has been denounced by several authors who focus on research related to the philosophy and sociology of education. Understanding the criticisms of classical authors, as well as the new approaches of contemporaries, can be a good alternative to reflect on new changes in the educational system around the world and denounce any possible attacks that enhance the control of neoliberal agents over the public management of education.

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