

Psychoanalytic notes: contemporary discourses on educational assessment in Brazil^I

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Abstract

Based on the conceptual inquiry characteristic of psychoanalysis in education, this work reflects on the other scene of the educational assessment policy in Brazil. Having as reference studies of Freud, Lacan and contemporary psychoanalysts, the article seeks to discuss the desire which sustains the social imaginary of such hegemonic discourse on assessment and determines contemporary educational discursive practices. For this discussion, I start from the observation that the discursive practices around the external evaluation of basic education^{III} and of the management of the public school system by results and incentives generate the worst possible effects on the educational act, on the teacher, on the child, and on the educational management itself. Such practices establish education based on the discourse of capital, whose mark is the mass production of excellent human capital, and on the university scientific discourse of analysis of educational policies, in which the subject is identified and labeled according to results and normative standards. This scenario, which is characteristic of globalized societies, demands further analysis and research to expand the theoretical framework about the status of the subject of desire, the educational act and the possible positions that children take in the face of the demand of adults in the context of education policies which link educational assessment and incentive mechanisms for results. In conclusion, I stress that the linkage between assessment and incentives has made education an even tougher event, since it reinforces the effects of the hegemonic educational discourse and reduces the conditions for education to happen for a large portion of our country's population.

Keywords

Psychoanalysis - Education - Educational assessment - Subjectivity.

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III- Translator's note: In Brasil, *basic education* comprises early childhood, primary and secondary education.

Notas psicanalíticas: os discursos contemporâneos acerca da avaliação educacional no Brasil^I

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Resumo

A partir da indagação conceitual própria da psicanálise no campo da educação, este trabalho reflete a respeito da outra cena da política de avaliação educacional no Brasil. Tendo como referência estudos de Freud, Lacan e psicanalistas contemporâneos, o artigo busca discutir o desejo que sustenta o imaginário social desse discurso hegemônico a respeito da avaliação e que determina as práticas discursivas pedagógicas contemporâneas. Para esta reflexão, parte-se da constatação de que as práticas discursivas articuladas em torno da avaliação externa da educação básica e da gestão do sistema público de ensino por resultados e incentivos geram os piores efeitos sobre o ato educativo, sobre o professor, sobre a criança e a própria gestão educacional. Tais práticas reinscrevem a educação a partir do discurso do capital, cuja marca é a produção em massa de capital humano de excelência, e do discurso científico-universitário de análise da política educacional, no qual o sujeito passa a ser identificado e rotulado de acordo com os resultados e padrões normativos. Esse cenário, característico das sociedades globalizadas, demanda novas análises, bem como pesquisas para ampliar o quadro teórico a respeito do estatuto do sujeito do desejo, do ato educativo e das possíveis posições que a criança assume junto à demanda do adulto no contexto de políticas educacionais que vinculam avaliação da educação e mecanismos de incentivos por resultados. Como conclusão, pontuamos que a vinculação entre avaliação e incentivo tem tornado a educação um acontecimento ainda mais difícil, pois reforça os efeitos do discurso pedagógico hegemônico e reduz as condições de a educação acontecer para grande parcela da população do nosso país.

Palavras-chave

I- Este trabalho recebe apoio da Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP/ Processo Número: 13/02840-6).

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Psicanálise – Educação – Avaliação educacional – Subjetividade.

Enunciating the problem

A country's education policy requires investments from modern states, and it is a strategic area related to the social, political and economic formation of a nation. Education represents a sector endowed with a large share of public budget, making it the object of disputes and interests within the political arena, which have been increasingly responding to the discourses of so-called quality, effectiveness and assessment. These notions have been widely incorporated among politicians and public policy managers.

The creation of teaching and education assessment systems in Brazil is set forth in supplementary legislation on education (the Education Principles and Guidelines Act - LDB (1996)), which centralizes attributions in the federal government. Its Article 9 (Sections VI, VIII and IX) establishes its responsibilities: "ensuring a nation-wide process of performance assessment in basic, secondary and higher education [...]"; and the "assessment [...] of courses of higher education institutions, as well as of organizations in their education system" (BRASIL, 1996).

With regard to basic education, it was in 1990 that the federal government began to organize the national system of assessment, some examples of which are the SAEB (National Basic Education System) - Regulation 1.795/1994 - and ENEM (National Secondary Education Examination) - Regulation 438/1998. In 2005, SAEB was revised and divided in two assessments, i.e., ANEB (National Basic Education Assessment), focusing on the management of school networks in each state, and ANRESC (National School Performance Assessment), also known as *Prova Brasil*, a census-based assessment focusing on urban school units.

It is commonly known that assessments can vary as to their orientation and focus, such as student learning, formation, and performance, as well as teachers, curriculum, plans, projects,

programs, and policies. Therefore, it becomes important to distinguish learning assessment (self-assessment), i.e., focusing on student formation and performed by the teacher in the classroom, from external evaluation, i.e., performed by government agencies through mass assessment systems covering the public education network. A school learning assessment can be considered an opportunity when placed in the hands of professionals involved in the educational act, thus propelling them into different, inventive ways of dealing with the creation of social bonds between teacher and student, and with school's transmission of something that is socially recognized.

Assessment as the core of school social practices, as a means in the school process rather than an end, and as an action involved with the educational act, allows both the student and the teacher to know exactly what the difficulties are, and to find a way through them, within the limits of education's real possibilities. As to the assessment sought through systems that assess the product of national, regional and local education, it is characterized, according to Souza (2009, p. 33-34), for its:

[...] emphasis on products and results; attributing merit to students, institutions or education networks; data on performance levels, resulting in their ranking; dominantly quantitative data; the detachment of external assessment, which is not articulated with self-evaluation.

In addition, this type of assessment causes the divulging of rankings in the media, and it is marked by its inscription in the pragmatic, managerial logic of State education management.

The central idea of this education management model is based, on one hand, on the contemporary managerial *belief* that such systems are mechanisms capable of inducing improvements in the quality of education, and on the other hand, on the principle that

an assessment generates competition among education networks, schools, students, etc. In this perspective, competition is understood to promote better student performances and school results. Theoretically, such a procedure involves the whole management hierarchy of an education system, which becomes subject to a higher degree of control, regulation, and accountability of its institutions and results, thus generating a space of competitive pressures within the education system. In this context, the success and failure criteria for a given policy are eventually defined by targets and parameters of analysis, and by the monitoring and external assessment of the *product*: the so-called *outputs* of the education system.

In Brazil, it has not been 20 years since federal administrations began to implement such systems in a political-economic scenario marked by a crisis of capital, global competitiveness, State reforms, the deconcentration, decentralization, and municipalization of education activities, the centralization of resources and of decision-making, and the increase in control, regulation and accountability mechanisms. The overall picture is one of structural changes in the State and in education itself.

In the logic of global competitiveness, of increase in education demand, and of highly qualified human capital production, displaying a country or its schools to the public opinion (whether national or international) through a ranking of education quality indices has come to symbolize, in a nearly hegemonic way, the performance of the education policies of a particular territory, country, state, city or school (CARNOY, 2004; FREITAS, 2007; MALET, 2010; SOUZA, 2009; SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2007). This emphasis has altered the relationship between the State and education professionals, which becomes no longer based on the mandate and responsibility of education authorities, but founded rather on management agreements, on *accountability*¹, and

1- The word *accountability* is being used here as the process of holding one responsible somehow, in line with the word's emergence in the international literature on public policy assessment.

on the assessment of schools' performance and effectiveness.

Existing studies in Brazil emphasize that just implementing assessment systems has not contributed for altering the overall student performance situation. On the contrary, in the field of education policy assessment, specialists argue that there is no concrete evidence of an *improvement effect* on education quality. Researchers consensually agree that the strong emphasis on assessment and external examinations twists education's purposes, pressing schools to narrow their curricula as a consequence of their adaptation to the monitoring and assessment systems (FRANCO; ALVES; BONAMINO, 2007; SOUZA, 2009; SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2007). Researchers conclude that these assessment systems have only served to inform education managers and to ratify data on "the student's low performance, considering the expectations defined for performance in the course of school life" (SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2007, p. 39).

In his study on the production related to school assessment, Fletcher (1995) noted that assessments' production logic implies selecting political, economic and regulatory sanctions, which are used as an incentive or a punishment. However, as the researcher warns us, such mechanisms eventually reinforce the social inequalities and *cognitive differences* between the poorer and the wealthier. The author analyzed the case of Chilean education reform, where the creation of a performance-based competitive system in the education sector did not affect the system's quality; instead, it aggravated school inequalities (CARNOY *apud* RAVELA, 2003).

In his analysis of the limits and possibilities of the current British assessment practices, Brighouse (2008) remarks that assessments' restricted emphasis on education *success* indices has created an educational atmosphere where students *learn to fail*, since results are always below the idealized targets. Malet (2010) also criticizes the unilateral focus of

academic performance assessments in a context marked by tensions between the bureaucratic rules established as work prescriptions, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the interests, conceptions and subjective experiences of their implementers (secretaries, managers, directors, coordinators, teachers). The French researcher considers that bureaucratic assessment generates conflicts and resistance in the school environment.

According to this author, conflicts occur due to the prescriptions imposed on professionals, and emerge from school professionals' relationship with the central education management hierarchy. These confrontations portray the disputes between different conceptions and views concerning assessments and the very meaning of education.

Cassassus' (2007) study, which analyzed a few cases in Latin America, reveals the worst effects of accountability actions performed by the State, particularly in mass programs that connect assessment to financial incentives. In sum, the effects were: decreasing teachers' dignity; undermining intrinsic motivation; stiffening the curricula; and destroying bonds between teachers and students.

In spite of the risk of further fraying the educational bond, the fact is that acknowledging these management systems' weak inducing power has motivated governments to create incentive mechanisms and to adopt criteria for applying them according to results and standards predefined in new ways of management agreements.

So far, in our country, connecting results to incentives is not the central element of education policies. Similar actions have been adopted by the Chilean education ministry in the 1980's, and later in Mexico, in the 1990's. In Brazil, such proposals are recent, as we can see from the cases of the state of São Paulo, which created the Quality in School Program and the IDESP (São Paulo Education Development Index); the state of Pernambuco has also created its own program of wage incentives tied to school results and student performance.

These cases illustrate a dangerous trend to education policies, inasmuch as municipal education networks can incorporate something similar to the already operational IDEB, such as parameters to targets, expanding such bonus pay for educational performance and basic education assessment programs to the other states and municipalities. These programs are based on the illusion that such incentive and sanction mechanisms for meeting targets can help to deal with the so-called low performance of educational policies.

In sum, it is important to think about how we can understand this paradoxical, contradictory situation expressed, on the one hand, through governments' actions by investing time and resources – the later so scarce – in mass assessment systems, and on the other hand, the evidence of studies that have warned about the weak impact on education quality improvement and the high risks that such education management models represent to school practices and to the educational act itself.

In other words, how is it that such a *bad deal*, both for the nation and the children, has been gaining hegemony within the State's educational bureaucracy? Could it be that educators and education managers actually want that which they desire? That is, fantasizing an ideal of performance, an ideal of student, and an ideal of child to the detriment of real conditions, so that education does not occur, does it all not make the educational act even harder? The effects of a uniformizing, standardizing policy for the school product are incompatible with the enunciation: *right to education for all*.

Apparently, the social imaginary dominated by the current political-pedagogical moral founded under the aegis of ranking and competitiveness, does not want to know anything about such devices which will inevitably produce the exclusion of the subject of desire and break the social bond produced in school. Until now, seemingly, managers and politicians involved in education *do not want*

to know anything about the negative effects that the current school assessment policies are producing, such as the radicalization of the psychosocial abyss existing in Brazilian education, the increase in intolerance towards differences, and the impoverishment of school contents and of children's daily life. It is ultimately the students who end up paying – with their own desire – for the *obsessive cause* of education.

In the psychoanalytical perspective, such an imaginary deception is known to have its origin in systematically ignoring questions that affect the core of the educational endeavor, such as the infantile sexuality² and the unconscious dimension of desire. As a consequence, any pedagogical practice beginning with an idealized, naturalized notion of the student's development ignores the reality of desire and the impossibility for results to be fully satisfactory. In other words, what we see is a desire oriented to an ideal represented by the semblant object of educational *high performance*, but which serves a death wish, which is doomed to lead to a worse state of things.

Psychoanalysis and education: an analytical discourse in the field of education

In the turn of the twentieth century, psychoanalysis was established into the discursive field of natural sciences and humanities by the Austrian doctor Sigmund Freud. Ever since then, a new hermeneutics of subjective processes has called upon the other discourses on the human and its conditions to face the unconscious as the determiner of action, as Foucault demonstrated in *Nietzsche, Freud, Marx* (1990). As he investigated the unconscious that constitutes subjectivity both

2- A mark of unconscious' timelessness, the infantile sexuality reveals the vicissitudes of the desire present in any act of educating someone, whether a child, an adult, or an adolescent. However, the educator ignores the impossible desire of his task, i.e., the impossibility of producing a child in the image and likeness of the one he or she once was, the (unconscious) ideal of child that contains the adult.

in its clinical and theoretical dimensions, Freud provided important tools for researchers in the field of humanities in general.

Freud's efforts to make psychoanalysis a science are well known. Although he failed in his attempts, his legacy has opened a new discursive field that enquires on the split subject (conscious/unconscious). Psychoanalysis subverts the Cartesian model of knowledge production by shifting from the notion of a subject of reason or of consciousness to the notion of a subject of desire or of the unconscious. The epistemic subject, arising from the Cartesian thinking, can have no other place but that of science, where assumptions underlying knowledge production are in the dimension of the object, i.e., the truth of the subject. In this case, the scientist's desire does not matter, while the formal cause, the idea, or the model does.

To psychoanalysis, in contrast, the dimension of being is included in the unconscious determination regarding knowledge, considered as the truth of desire, which emerges materially in its symbolic singularity, through slips, memory lapses, jokes, and dreams.

Sigmund Freud meant himself to be a man of science and, as such, his discourse was committed to experimental science. It is curious to note that, for the sake of scientific knowledge, the psychoanalyst eventually came to the discovery of the unconscious, indicating the radical difference in his object of study, which determined his theory of a subject split – *Spaltung* – or, according to Lacan, “our experienced division as subjects as a division between knowledge and truth” (LACAN, 1989, p. 5). By listening to the suffering of others, Freud captured the (logic) truth of patients' unconscious desire in such a way that the scientific and medical moral did not accept it at the time. It is the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan who will later highlight the discovery of psychoanalysis. In 1966, in *Science and Truth* (1989, p. 11-12), Lacan asserts:

The opposition between the exact sciences and the conjectural sciences is no longer sustainable once conjecture is subject to exact calculation (using probability) and exactness is merely grounded in a formalism separating axioms from laws for grouping symbols [...] – that of psychoanalysis' position inside or outside of science – I have also indicated that the question probably cannot be answered without the object's status in sciences as such being thereby modified.

Lacan mentions the concept of *object a*, which founds the whole dialectics of desire and of the subject. It is relevant to mention that Lacan's return to Freud has allowed important reinterpretations for the progress of psychoanalysis. The *objet petit a* (object *a*) is a term *invented* by Lacan in order to emphasize the unconscious determination of the object (a radical mark of the difference from science's notion of object), and to designate "the object desired by the subject, which escapes the subject to a point of being beyond representation or of becoming a non-symbolizable 'surplus'" (ROUDINESCO; PLON, 1988, p. 551). Although the concept has undergone changes and new articulations, the notion of object *small a* indicates the object *cause of desire*, and not the object of desire itself, since sexual desire has no object³. Therefore, the *small a* is like an unconscious template that produces the objects in which desire will be alienated. It is important to consider that, in this psychoanalytical reading, the subject is not the cause of itself, as it is alienated in the signifying function of the Other. In this primordial operation, the object *a* can be understood as a cut in the big Other⁴, as a part which moves out and outlines

3- For psychoanalysis, the unconscious dimension of desire is fundamentally related to the sexual cause, which points to the primordial lost object; this lost object relates to psychological functioning as the structure that economically maintains the libidinal dynamics of the cause of desire.

4- In Lacan's trajectory, the notion of "the big Other", designated by the capitalized letter *A* [A], assumes different meanings in the course of his teachings. The Other can arise as a demand, as desire (object *a*), as

the lack in the Other, i.e., as the mark of the subject's impossibility to restore the lost object's completeness and to encounter with the desire of the Other. Because it is the mark of lack, the object *a* precipitates the subject's emergence as an irreducible difference, since then marked by the desire to know about this impossible, non-symbolizable object.

According to Lacan, the *causation of the subject* derives from these two psychic operations, *alienation* and *separation*, which were mentioned in the subject's relationship with the big Other. Therefore, while it encodes the impossible of desire, the *small a* leads to fissure and separation in relation to the big Other, as it lacks meaning and completeness. By proposing the triad of real, symbolic, and imaginary (RSI) as the psychic registers where all human experiences develop, Lacan articulates the symbolic domain and the big Other as the language rules which subject the speakers, i.e., as the place of signifiers and of paternal function.

The imaginary psychic register is defined as the place of the ego (*moi*), understood as the place of ego's illusions⁵, as well as of alienation, deception, specular capitulation, and fusion with the mother's body. As to the real, it is inscribed by its negativity, i.e., as a non-symbolizable surplus, a mark of object *a*'s real status.

The imaginary ego can be said to invest the Other as an illusion of return to the lost completeness that the paternal function has imposed; however, because it is impossible, such a return causes the real to emerge in object *a*, which operates as a guarantee of some pleasure and impels towards the causation of the subject. From the shades of this lost place arises the *small*

jouissance, and depending on its formalization in the linguistic field, the Other represents the structure of language. In sum, as a symbolic order that precedes the being itself.

5- Lacan distinguished *Moi*, the "imaginary ego" of egoic identification, from *Je*, the subject of the unconscious and of desire. Thus, *Moi* corresponds to the subject of the statement, i.e., as an ideal imagined in the alienation of the symbolic Other, in opposition to the subject of the enunciation *Je*, i.e., the subject of the unconscious. It is precisely the emergence of the subject of the unconscious that produces the non-sense, which lacks signification, while fixing desire into the discourse, within the rules of human language.

a, the cause of desire and of the subject, the mark of the Other's presence and absence. This experience founds Lacan's famous aphorisms, "man's desire is the desire of the Other" (LACAN, 2014; 2006), and the notion of the "unconscious being structured as a language" (LACAN, 1977; 2006), formulated from the linguistic studies produced at the time. Therefore, Lacan's return to Freud reaffirms the Freudian unconscious as the *other scene*, or the third place that escapes consciousness, i.e., the subject of desire marked by the impossible of language.

After this brief but necessary digression, we can say that Freud's scientificism, a symbolic legacy of his time, led him to tread the path of his discovery, i.e., the one revealing that the representation of human being as rational, a master of itself and of its thoughts and actions, was but an obstacle, a resistance to unconscious knowledge and, consequently, a deadlock to the entire division that constitutes the psyche and founds the notion of subject and subjectivity for psychoanalysis.

In other words, the unconscious hypothesis constitutes a way of dealing with that which affects the scientific discourse precisely in what escapes it, such as the real and symbolic effect of the unconscious, which makes a gap in knowledge, the defect as a symptom of the other's knowledge. Thus, truth and knowledge arise in opposite places. Truth as an imaginary, illusory power, as embodied in the figures of the scientist, the politician, the educator, the doctor, the preacher, and the shaman, constitutes a correlate of the illusion of living in a world enclosed by signifying totalities and by efficient causes. The structure of truth⁶ dominates and excludes any fault, defect, or conflict that may arise in the subject's relationship with knowledge and with its objects of knowledge.

It is relevant to note that, according to Lacan, the subject of the unconscious eventually comes to affirm that the Cartesian subject is

there, "at the core of differences", which implies the other, i.e., the reverse of psychoanalysis. Such a difference is visible in the status that the discourse of the master has assumed as scientific knowledge, as well as in the *truth* produced by the discourse of the university and its reverse, the unconscious knowledge, *a knowledge that does not know itself*, irreducible and unspeakable, which Lacan (2007), in his Seminar 17, called the psychoanalytic discourse.

To psychoanalysis, there is a radical difference between the symbolic knowledge (*savoir*) and the imaginary knowledge (*connaissance*). Lacan presents the former as an operation resulting from the unconscious subject, while the latter is treated considering its rational, instrumental origin, such as the information and technology produced and accumulated through science. As to *savoir*, which is like *a knowledge that does not know itself*, it refers to the experience of the subject of desire with unconscious knowledge. This knowledge is also a *means of jouissance* and, therefore, an unconscious knowledge about the loss of jouissance (*object a*), a condition of the social bond produced by the desire to know about life and death, about the subject's want-to-be, and about the reality and the impossible dimension of desire.

Psychoanalysis' development has shown that every socialization process implies the particular process of the individual's drive constitution. In 1913, Freud wrote:

[...] Psycho-analysis has established an intimate connection between these psychical achievements of individuals on the one hand and societies on the other by postulating one and the same dynamic source for both of them. (FREUD, 1966, p. 185)

The Austrian doctor asserted, in 1925, that education, like politics and psychoanalysis, was an impossible profession or practice (FREUD, 1966b), since the dimension of desire

⁶- In the Lacanian perspective, truth has a structure equivalent to those of fiction and of myth. Cf. *Seminar 18, On a discourse that would not be of the semblant* (LACAN, s. d.); *The neurotic's individual myth* (LACAN, 1979).

escapes all attempts at normatization and rational, conscious control by the human being. In the psychoanalytical reading presented by Kupfer (2001, 2005), Lajonquière (1993, 1997, 1998, 2010) and Cohen (2006, 2009), education, as Freud asserted, is one of the impossible professions in that the unconscious dimension, which makes human acts singular, allows no predictability or standardizing of results. There is always a surplus, the mark of the impossibility for this demand to be fully met.

Goldenberg (2010, p.8) clarifies that “it is less ‘being’ than ‘doing’ what stands out in Freud’s witty proposition, as he chooses three verbs, rather than three nouns (i.e., governing, educating, and healing)”, while demonstrating his interest in such practices. With regard to the impossible professions, the author remarks:

And the adjective “impossible” with which he qualifies the work of politicians (but also that of teachers, doctors, and his own, i.e. of the psychoanalyst) does not spell impotence. On the contrary, despite the incongruity, “impossible” indicates the conditions of possibility of these tasks. Here is the difference between a disposition to achieve a particular, precise point, and coming near it in an asymptotic way (GOLDENBERG, 2006, p. 8).

Therefore, when education is thus treated as an impossible, failure-doomed practice, the purpose is not to deprive it of its legitimate aspirations of socialization, humanization, formation, and subjectivation on which depends the society of speaking beings, but rather to remind us that impossibility is part of every educational act, as its “results are always unsatisfactory” (LAJONQUIÈRE, 2002, p. 26).

To psychoanalysis, what makes these social practices indicated by Freud impossible are the dimensions of unconscious desire and of language, which are responsible for social bonds. In this perspective, to consider the presence of the subject of the unconscious in

the educational act as the impossible dimension of education implies at least a compromise relationship, in order to symbolize the educable (the demands of civilization) and the drive-related uneducable (the repetition of *jouissance*), as a way of approaching its real dimension, thus allowing new ways of sublimating the real of drive. It is noteworthy that sublimation is understood here as a psychic process responsible for detouring one’s drive from its purely sexual destination, thus sublimating it into a satisfaction obtained through cultural objects. As Lajonquière emphasizes (2010, p.62-63):

[...] educating is transmitting symbolic marks that allow the child to gain itself a place in a more or less familiar history, and thus be able to venture out in the endeavors of desire.

Therefore, we have education as a modern social bond that introduces the child into the world of culture. In this process of constitution of the subject, psychoanalysis allow us to think an education prepared for the impossible reality of desire, a background that conceives “education within the field of word and language, animated by desire, thus emphasizing its essence as a social bond” (LAJONQUIÈRE, 2010, p. 78).

At different times during his trajectory, Freud (1913, 1914) highlighted the importance of psychoanalysis to education, postulating the relevance of infantile sexuality and of unconscious psychic processes such as sublimation, transference, and identification, which are involved in subjectivation and in the transmission of knowledge. He also warned about the need to think a psychoanalytically enlightened education that would include conflicts of drive into the education agenda (FREUD, 1966; 1966a), with an emphasis on education’s structuring role to subjectivity, through a drive renouncement that supervenes upon the subject as a possible path for human drives, and as the possibility of a *social bond*. In

sum, the possibility to inscribe drive operating as a process of sublimation.

Freud started from the conception that the psychic functioning was aimed at a single goal, i.e., the pursuit of satisfaction, with the decrease of displeasure or inner tensions (pleasure/displeasure principle). While he asserted the imperative of the pleasure principle, he also said that this objective was impossible and doomed to failure, due to the existing antagonism between unconscious impulses and cultural restrictions. In this respect, he referred to discontent as a structural condition to the libidinal economy of the psyche.

A critic of the dominant religious moral of his time, Freud questioned the suffering caused by certain practices which were both inadequate and impossible. In *The Claims of Psycho-analysis to Scientific Interest* (1966), originally published in 1913, he affirmed:

Psycho-analysis has frequent opportunities of observing the part played by inopportune and undiscerning severity of upbringing in the production of neuroses, or the price, in loss of efficiency and of capacity for enjoyment, which has to be paid by the normality upon which the educator insists. And psycho-analysis can also show what precious contributions to the formation of character are made by these asocial and perverse instincts in the child, if they are not subject to repression but are diverted from their original aims to other more valuable ones by the process known as 'sublimation'. Our highest virtues have grown up, as reaction formations and sublimations, out of our worst dispositions. Education should scrupulously refrain from burying these precious springs of action and should restrict itself to encouraging the processes by which these energies are led along safe paths (FREUD, 1966, p. 189-190).

Later, in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, originally published in 1930, Freud (1966c,

p. 35) remarks, in a footnote, on his view of education: "[...] education is behaving as though one were to equip people starting on a Polar expedition with summer clothing and maps of the Italian Lakes". He realizes that education "conceals from them the part which sexuality will play in their lives", i.e., it does not want to know anything about the desire involved in it. The notion of education which is formed using the psychoanalytical thinking can therefore be enunciated as education to the impossible reality of desire. This approach differs radically from the pedagogical notion of teaching understood as a set of positive forms of knowledge about the supposedly natural adequacy of education's means to its ends.

Therefore, psychoanalysis stresses the symbolic sense of education – as a constitutive, subjectivating experience –, which goes beyond its political, economic and social (conformation) purposes. Education's economic and social purposes are real, but education is also a determinism of formation and subjectivation. In this perspective, education appears as a symbolic structure, the *locus* of production of the word. In other words, its character consists in generating *symbolic marks* which are capable of entwining the subject of desire in the singular course of a "more or less familiar history and thus be able to venture out in the endeavors of desire" (LAJONQUIÈRE, 2010, p.63), revealing that desire is the very stuff of the social bond produced by education.

With regard to the difference between education and teaching, the intrinsic difference between learning and educating a person also becomes evident. According to Hannah Arendt (1961, p. 196), we can say that:

[...] one cannot educate without at the same time teaching; an education without learning is empty, [...] but one can easily teach without educating, and can go on learning to the end of one's days without for that reason becoming educated.

Arendt reminds us that education is not reduced to the pragmatic discourse pursued through specialized knowledge, which reduces the educational act to a methodological control of learning. Based on the constitution of the subject of desire, psychoanalysis provides us the possibility to think the structural dimension of education as the very function of desire, which results from the impossible encounter of the younger with the older, of children with adults. As Lajonquière (2010, p. 63) reminds us:

Subjecting a child to desire does not constitute a new education goal. It is the very stuff of education; therefore, we cannot talk about the singularity of a new psychoanalytical pedagogy in a strict sense.

This is a fundamental question, as it demarcates another incursion of psychoanalysis into the field of education, yet not in the same way as the lines of work already known within the psychoanalysis-education connection, such as *psychoanalysis applied to education*, *psychoanalysis for children*, or *even psychoanalytical pedagogy*, but rather as a practice interested in debating and analyzing the conditions of possibility of education as resulting from a symbolic filiation.

Therefore, it is a discursive field that questions certain tendencies pertaining to the educational enterprise which reveal themselves, in the light of psychoanalysis, as illusions, symptoms, resistances, inhibitions, and obsessions; also, it is fundamentally a practice that aims to subvert the hegemonic educational discourses into the logic of inscribing the subject of desire. In this way, psychoanalysis warns about certain so-called natural tendencies, such as the technician-scientificist illusions or the (psycho)pedagogical illusions (LAJONQUIÈRE, 2009). In other words, it warns about that which, in the light of psychoanalysis, emerges as an illusion and a systematic ignorance of the impossible dimension of desire, which comes to play in every educational act.

The other scene of the discourses on basic education assessment

The systematic ignorance of the impossibility to satisfy the current assessment demands for targets and results, for all the good intentions that might come with them, reveals the *pedagogical neurosis* that prevails in the educational field – a result of the psychic repression⁷ of a knowledge or desire. This repression feeds the modern pedagogical illusion, while reinforcing the *pedagogical discontent* announced by educators and by the discourses on the pedagogical ineffectiveness/failure of public education policies.

A greater closeness between psychoanalysis and the educational field allows questioning the *other scene* in assessment discourses, i.e., the unconscious desire to improve the quality of education and teaching, which feeds managers' *belief* regarding assessment and management targets. This illusion is sustained on the desire of being assessed by the same measure, of being compared with the other in everything with the same ruler or model, like multilateral agencies and the market evaluate education systems in the globalized world. However, at the center of this narcissist demand for knowledge and idealization, which cries for being just another one alike, a violent rejection operates in the unconscious against difference, and therefore against the desire to know, which is a mark of the educational demand. Therefore, the pursuit for the same, the identical, the one just like the others, i.e., the *desire of not desiring anything different* from the idealized, eventually reveals itself as a narcissist fantasy propelled by a death

7 - A repression is a psychic operation which, according to Freud's psyche theory, attempts to keep certain representations unconscious that would threaten to cause displeasure to the subject. The repression acts on thoughts, ideas, fantasies, memories, etc., that are not adjusted to the subject's ideal image of the world and of itself (LAPLANCHE; PONTALIS, 1998, p.430). The imaginary dimension dominates any attempt at puncturing the perfection of the ideal image, which sustains this image, thus taking off the scene the symbolic and real dimension of desire, which marks human experience and adventure with differences.

wish, and, as such, it can only lead to worse, as the myth of Narcissus reminds us.

This approach allows us to question these pedagogical illusions, as it provides us a tool that can articulate the *demand aimed at performance targets with the hegemonic pedagogical discourse*: the political and pedagogical discourse's imaginary power represses the fact that the educational enterprise "is currently oriented by radically impossible targets that this (psycho)pedagogical discourse formulates to itself" (LAJONQUIÈRE, 1998, p. 93). Therefore, one must question "the ignorance that pedagogues manifest on the radically impossible character of their self-proposed targets" (LAJONQUIÈRE, 1998, p. 93).

Therefore, the assessment discourse emerges as a decoy, precisely because it is an illusion of control about education's impossible knowledge, i.e., about the school's demand and the student's desire to know. As a source of illusion, the assessment stands as the only reality to the constitutive question of the subject, *What does the other want from me?* Inasmuch as the assessment believes that it can provide this answer as a learning and teaching reality, the educational demand's implicit structural lack is suppressed – a lack which allows the object cause of desire to precipitate – as the subject's cause of knowledge, as the (dis)course of the desire of the Other.

In fact, this is an illusion doomed to failure, since difference and desire – which characterize the subject symbolically inscribed through education as a singular subjectivity – cease to operate, and to their detriment the dominant ideal of results-oriented pedagogical policy sets in. In turn, this disposition causes, in the sphere of school daily relations and practices, an impossibility for social bonds to correspond to the symbolic filiation effects that are minimally expected in the educational act as the conditions involved in the socialization, humanization and singularization/subjectivation of the younger.

The imaginary decoy is protected by *educational neuroses*, and is characterized by ignorance on issues that affect the core of the educational enterprise, such as the impossibility of fitting pedagogical practices based on an idealized, naturalized notion of student development. In this case, as Lajonquière (1998; 2009; 2010) stresses about the latent desire in *psychopedagogical illusions*, this desire characterizes a *desire of not desiring* which denies the subject the possibility to recognize its own history as a difference. Such condition can only promote the specular logic of assessments and reinforce the *pedagogical terror* within schools, or the worst, i.e., the adult's desistance from the educational act.

Moreover, the desire underlying assessments is one of a narcissist nature, i.e., its imaginary inscription propels the fantasy of not being different from the educational ideal in vogue, which, in turn, implies erasing differences and the symbolic aspects of other possible identifications. As a result of this assessment logic, the subject becomes completely obligated to the dual, imaginary relationship with the Other. In other words, it is captured by the image that determines it, i.e., the results gauged by education system analyses. Being assessed or not is what makes this question a singular one, rather than the massification of education towards standards and uniformity.

What this discourse conceals is that in order for bonds to exist, whether social, educational, or bureaucratic ones, and in order for the child to be inscribed in the social bond proposed in the school's discourse, the other cannot be reduced to an object for its own jouissance. Maud Mannoni (1973), in her classic work *Éducation Impossible*, warned about the fact that a child should not be taken as the support of scientific knowledge, i.e., it should not be used for *supporting the supposed truth of a theory*. By questioning the positivist exaggeration in modern pedagogy, the psychoanalyst denounced the Enlightenment-

based *pedagogical terror* dominant in the French national education system. It was a pedagogy that oscillated between the ideals of freedom of the 19th century and the principles of discipline of the 17th century religious tradition of Jesuits. Indeed, Mannoni indicated the dimension of the political – the first level of action – as a possibility of questioning the necessary conditions for education to occur, as well as the opposite, i.e., what must not be done which makes education difficult to occur.

Following the affirmation that there is a “discourse of mastery and transparency, of predicting everything, of controlling and knowing everything” (CHARLOT, 2006), which also refers to the current disposition of public policy managers to focus on the quality, effectiveness and assessment of education policies, one cannot avoid questioning the position occupied by the student as the product of an education policy. If this social bond is marked by mastery, its inscription in the discourse of the university will turn the student and the implementers into an object for sustaining its knowledge practice focused on results.

Such is the case of education policies which, through educational scientificism, have turned the educational process into a true symptom producer, in that it “indulges in the use of bold education methods, turning the child into a guinea pig, the object of its experiments, in the name of modern pedagogies” or of some education ideal (COHEN, 2006, p.100), while, on the other hand, disempowering and denying the educator’s knowledge in the name of bold administrative models and new educational technologies.

The performance expected from the student, which is implicit in assessment systems, as seen in a few taxonomic terms such as *basic*, *adequate*, or *advanced*, reveals a logic of proportionality founded on the naturalistic psychobiology of child development. In this perspective, the observed target or rate refers to the level of partial development of contents, competences and skills required for the school

year in which the children are. The rule of *(psycho)pedagogical illusion* and discourse is thus established. This is, in fact, a positivist belief in the naturalness of child development, as well as in the proportionality between educational intervention and the performance expected *a priori* in cognitive and maturational terms –, a way of thinking education issues which, as it is considered natural and sustained by pedagogies of diverse scientific tones, raises no suspicion about its consequences:

[...] the change in the current demand, which pursues impossible targets, reinforces a series of symptoms, the discursive effects of modern pedagogy, which will invariably reinforce the psychologization of school daily life (LAJONQUIÉRE, 1998).

Therefore, the moment when education policies began to be inscribed by the metrics of international standards for education quality management, i.e., when they began to be hegemonically operated through mass assessment practices, a consequence that has stood out is the erasing of difference and of the very desire implied in the educational act. We have seen nothing but a repetition of the same: failure in school, low performance, and the increase in social, economic, political, and cultural inequalities, inasmuch as education systems have turned into sophisticated mechanisms to serve school ranking, selection, failure, and exclusion.

This reality reveals the other face of the problem: the real of the *psychosocial abyss* in Brazilian education, in which the public education system has been systematically and progressively built to (re)produce the school failure of the different, of poor children, by turning differences into social inequalities, learning deficits, psychological and neurological problems of students, etc. Moreover, what we have historically witnessed is a total erasing of the meaning of education, i.e., *in the name of what is a child educated?* Therefore, we see

a systematic ignorance about the symbolic filiation, which operates the discourses in the educational field, as well as its effects on social bonds. As Lajonquière (2013) stresses,

[...] modern school's installation and consolidation is consubstantial with the life of the democracies that have managed to build a welfare state oriented to social justice, and this is a step with a dominantly political essence, in the sense of the founding character of actions undertaken in the heart of the *polis*. This does not mean that education in itself should produce isolated effects considered as markers of social development. It means, rather, that if education has eventually developed in a given country, it is because its foundation was part of the very process of founding a nation for all. [...] Therefore, it is no surprise that a country like ours, where wealth distribution is impervious to changes, should have a functionally corresponding school system "at two speeds", i.e., a national education non-system, actually. In this case, the country falls short of having a national education system, although it might eventually have a group of different schools, sometimes for rich people, sometimes for poor people, all of which are always subject to facets of the mercantile logic, which risks the very principles of the relationship to knowledge.

As an aggravating effect, under the economic and financial globalization of capital, there is the dominance of the capitalist discourse in the education field. This implies thinking that the dominant social bond, which is produced around the education policy and based on the lay, compulsory, free school intended for citizens' formation, ceases to operate as the master signifier to be inscribed instead according to the dominance of the discourse of the capitalist master. The logic of consumption is known to subject everything and everyone to

the production of objects, as well as of human capital, the perverse mark of the increase of economic interests in education policies.

This economic relationship to knowledge caused by the dominance of the capitalist discourse in the education field inscribes the educational act as an exchange in terms of market, where the assessment encodes one's value in the exchange system. In sum, knowledge is turned into value, the recent mark of our knowledge society. At the same time, we see the migration of market management techniques into the public administration, in much the same way as the assessment criteria and demanding quality and competitiveness standards of private services are being systematically implemented in the field of education policies. Finally, the fusion is made between the capitalist discourse and the scientific, technicist pragmatism of school effectiveness. The capitalist discourse declines the desire of the subject of school demand and perverts the formative meaning of education as it produces, to the detriment of the *polis* citizen, the subject of consumerist desire.

The moment when the assessment result encodes the subject, i.e., when it produces an exchange value for the capital, as with the operation of bonus programs associated with the assessment and management of school results, knowledge ceases to be attributed to the educational operation, and becomes a capitalist *savoir-faire*, i.e., it ceases to be the signifying law of desire, which makes social bonds and inscriptions viable, to become instead the market law, in which the law of the strongest prevails.

What is produced under the imperative of this discourse, according to Lacan, is the surplus value, or the surplus enjoyment of the capitalist master. Put another way, the subject will be deprived of its surplus enjoyment (object *a*) in that the shift from the discourse of the master to the capitalist discourse indicates precisely the deprivation of the unconscious knowledge about the subject's desire, about the cause of its desire. This discourse is known to

indicate the foreclosure of the law and of desire. The word *foreclosure* designates the mechanism of psychosis, based on the model of paranoia, which operates the rejection of a signifier from the symbolic universe of the subject. When this rejection is produced, then it is said that the symbolic (a signifier) has been *foreclosed*, i.e., it is not integrated in the unconscious, but returns in a hallucinatory form in the real (ROUDINESCO; PLON, 1998, p. 245).

In his *Seminar 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, Lacan inscribes the discourse of science in the order of the paranoia structure, in that by denying the *Thing* and creating an object in the real, it promotes the foreclosure and/or erasure of the subject. In this perspective, we can say that:

In the logic of dominance discourses, the subject suffers an erasing associated with the foreclosure of the symbolic as a subjective dimension, produced by the very scribing of the discourse. By producing its own object of knowledge, science erases the subject. It is precisely the symbolic foreclosed by the discourse of the university/science that returns in the real as a failure of the symbolic (PASSONE, 2013, p. 64).

What is left to this subject is desistance, revolt, or the symptom. By giving up education ideas and viewpoints, the subject stands outside the discourse, like the insane, the escapees, the desisters, the excluded, etc. By revolting against the official discourse, the subject can attempt to recover the reins of power; here, we have the unconscious as a *policy of desire* which actually founds a new state. As an example, we see university students revolting against the hegemonic discourse of the modern master, demanding that the State recognize its power position as a slave of knowledge. By symptomatizing, we have the subject of the social bond founded by the modern discourses, or ultimately, the concrete discourse which

finds the field of the subject's transindividual reality, and which manifests itself as the product of educational discourses (PASSONE, 2012).

In the sphere of basic education, as far as administrations (whether left or right wing) and even many specialists and education managers are concerned, there is no problem with the current assessment excess in our education systems and networks. In spite of repeated low performance, increase in student medicalization and in teacher illnesses, it is hardly surprising that policies' discursive efforts around educational quality have obliterated the real of Brazilian educational conditions, by basically denying the existence of two types of schools, which, as we know, move at different paces and in different directions.

The institutional, organizational, and political blindness – or not-wanting-to-know – about the perceptible education abyss existing between the different Brazilian social classes points us to its perverse effects. It is, in fact, a question of not wanting to know anything about the symbolic debt that we inherited with the foundation of our nation, as well as the systematic denial of the historical, subjectivating conditions implied in the formation of new citizens for the *polis*. As Lajonquière (2010, p.63) stresses, school systems should “form an idiosyncratic nation, i.e., a sort of large family where there could very well be just one single group of solipsists.”

Therefore, we conclude that, by pursuing ideal performance standards, the education system makes the educational fact even more difficult to occur, a mark of our education throughout history, imposed by the country's political and economic elites, which means not recognizing the educational debt that the nation inherited in its own foundation. Through the denial of this symbolic debt, history itself is also put aside, along with difference and desire, thus compromising both the social bond and the conditions of civility in the *polis*.

After all, to what are the assessments contributing? From what we can verify, a bond

between assessment and incentives makes education an even more difficult occurrence, thus reinforcing the effects of the hegemonic pedagogical discourse and reducing the conditions for education to take place. We do

not intend to exhaust the matter, but rather to present a specific perspective about research in this area, emphasizing its production as a type of knowledge that enquires on the conditions for education to happen.

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