

DOSSIER

*Internationalization of educational policies within the framework of human rights***UNESCO, World Bank, and OECD: Global perspectives on the right to education and implications for the teaching profession*****Unesco, Banco Mundial e OCDE: perspectivas globais sobre o direito à educação e implicações para a profissão docente*****Juliana de Fátima Souza^a**
jusouzar@ufmg.br**ABSTRACT**

This paper addresses the global governance of education and the construction of new consensuses on the right to education, as well as the implications of these processes on the teaching profession. It discusses the role of UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD in shaping educational policies, highlighting their values and *modus operandi*. These three international organizations have developed narratives about the role of education in the 21st century, aligned with neoliberal rationality and the knowledge economy paradigm. As actors in transnational regulation, they have created a repertoire of evidence-based technologies involving information, competitive comparison, and benchmarking, with strong persuasive power over national education systems. In line with results-oriented educational management, teachers are perceived as essential resources for improving student performance and are pressured through mechanisms that combine evaluation, accountability, and dissemination of best practices. The discussions are based on the epistemological perspective of combined theorization, employing the concepts of multi-regulation of education, governance of education, and political networks. The first part of the text develops a theoretical discussion on the identities and trajectories of international organizations. The second part analyzes instruments and narratives used by the three IOs in the reconfiguration of education and the teaching profession.

Keywords: Educational Policy. Teaching Profession. World Bank. OECD. UNESCO.

RESUMO

Este artigo aborda a governança global da educação e a construção de novos consensos sobre o direito à educação, bem como as implicações desses processos para a profissão docente. Discute o papel da Unesco, do Banco Mundial e da OCDE na modelagem de políticas educacionais, evidenciando seus valores e *modus operandi*. Essas três organizações internacionais têm desenvolvido narrativas sobre o papel da educação no século XXI, alinhadas à racionalidade neoliberal e ao paradigma da economia do conhecimento. Como atores da regulação transnacional, elas criaram um repertório de tecnologias baseadas em evidências que envolvem informação, comparação competitiva e *benchmarking*, com forte poder de persuasão sobre os sistemas nacionais de educação. Em consonância com uma gestão educacional orientada para resultados, os docentes são percebidos como recursos essenciais para a melhoria do desempenho estudantil e constrangidos por meio de mecanismos que combinam avaliação, responsabilização e disseminação de melhores práticas. As

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discussões se baseiam na perspectiva epistemológica da teorização combinada, empregando os conceitos de multirregulação educacional, governança educacional e redes políticas. A primeira parte do texto desenvolve uma discussão teórica sobre as identidades e trajetórias das organizações internacionais. A segunda parte analisa instrumentos e narrativas utilizados pelas três OIs na reconfiguração da educação e da profissão docente.

Palavras-chave: Política Educacional. Profissão Docente. Banco Mundial. OCDE. UNESCO.

Introduction

The global governance of education and the construction of new consensuses on the right to education, as well as the implications of these processes for the teaching profession, are the central themes of this article. Particularly since the 1990s, institutions formed in the post-World War II era, such as the World Bank (WB), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), have more sophisticatedly mobilized their administrative divisions focused on education and expanded their capacities to influence national regulatory frameworks. These international organizations (IOs) have taken a more assertive role in shaping global education policies, developing narratives about the role of education in the 21st century and anticipating/projecting the future in line with the neoliberal prerogatives of the knowledge economy.

In this context, this paper¹ addresses the temporalities of the global governance of education, highlighting the values and *modus operandi* of the aforementioned IOs. While identifying successive adjustments in the discourse on the right to education worldwide, it points to a restructuring of the teaching profession, driven by the increasing accountability placed on teachers for student performance – a phenomenon facilitated by the spread of control technologies, such as large-scale assessments.

The first part of the text explores the shift in political frameworks that have guided educational reforms in the last decades and situates what Susan Robertson (2016) qualified as the transition from a thin global governance of education, in the post-World War II period, to a thickening global governance starting in the 1990s. The second part draws on instruments coordinated by IOs to discuss the centrality of teachers in educational reforms and to highlight how the “good” teacher has been globally constructed or codified in contemporary times, and to what extent these narratives may contribute to the teaching (de)professionalization.

The discussions are anchored in the epistemological perspective of combined theorization, which has proven capable of supporting a coherent and articulated analysis of complex issues in educational policy (Mainardes, 2018). The predominant frameworks are those of multi-regulation of education (Barroso, 2004; 2005; Maroy, 2004; 2011), governance of education (Dale, 2004; 2010), and policy networks (Ball, 2002; 2014), with an emphasis on the role played by transnational actors in this process. In contrast to methodological nationalism and methodological statism, the associated concepts offer a range of possibilities for interpreting how educational policy is becoming

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increasingly global and how supranational actors have been forging new consensuses on the right to education and the teaching profession.

From the thin global governance of education to the thickening global governance of education

The globalization of the discourse on education is not something new. Since the end of World War II, the right to education has reached the status (at least discursively) of a political priority on a global scale, driven by the rise of organizations such as UNESCO (1945), the World Bank (1944), and the OECD (1948)², which set out to mediate this debate in the international arena and build consensuses on the importance and purposes of education. However, over the past few decades, there has been a significant shift in the dynamics of the global governance of education, both in terms of the narratives built and the technologies applied to disseminate this agenda, as well as the expansion of transnational regulatory influence over the States' own frameworks.

Regarding narratives, Lessard and Carpentier (2016) argue that this evolution is marked by at least two political references that in their time represent cognitive and normative matrices useful for guiding political decisions, although the transition from one to the other does not mean the complete disappearance of the first. A reference, in the authors' conception, is

a vision of the place and role of a sector of activity in society. It encompasses values (*e.g., equal opportunities or equity*), norms and principles of action, ideas and causal relationships (*if... then*), as well as injunctions (*it is necessary...*), which provide meaning and coherence to public action (Lessard; Carpentier 2016, p. 16, authors emphasis).

They point out that the first political framework is associated with the Welfare State and the ideas of modernization and democratization of education, aiming the development of a mass education system according to the republican ideal of equal opportunities. This refers to an education committed to modernity, progress, and the appreciation of individual talents. The second framework, predominant from the 1990s onward, is associated with neoliberalism and the notion of an emerging knowledge economy, in which educational systems are reoriented towards the production of knowledge and the development of skills capable of increasing countries' competitiveness, with an update and deepening of Human Capital Theory. While the primary concern in the first moment was the universalization of enrollment, in the second, attention shifts to the management of educational systems in pursuit of greater efficiency and effectiveness (Lessard; Carpentier 2016).

It is important to emphasize that neoliberalism, which can be defined as "a complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of the 'market' as a basis for the universalization of social relations" (Shamir *apud* Ball, 2016, p. 1047, author emphasis), begins to strongly impact all domains of life in society, producing new institutional behaviors and new subjectivities. In this sense, Dardot and Laval (2016, p. 17) warn that, before being an ideology or an economic policy, neoliberalism is, first and foremost, a

² The foundations of the OECD are in the Organization for European Economic Cooperation, created in 1948, which after 1961 had its identity reformulated and began to include non-European countries.

rationality and, as such, “tends to structure and organize not only the actions of the rulers but even the conduct of the ruled”.

Ball (2016) states that, although neoliberal educational reform operates at different speeds and intensities in each location, there is little room to promote changes that are not aligned with this ideology. Thus, educational systems start being guided by management principles typical of the market, with the establishment of a New Public Management, grounded in economic-financial logic and based on evidence (Verger; Normand 2015). The proliferation of large-scale assessment systems, after the 1990s, is one of the symptoms of this framework, as a discursive hegemony is built around the idea of learning outcomes. This approach imposes key restrictions on what could be considered educational practices within the scope of the right to education, since most national education systems have focused primarily on the results of specific subjects considered useful for the labor market – such as Portuguese and Mathematics. As a result, the complexity of education as a social right is neglected, whereas it should include a permanent focus on learning related to citizenship and the full human development. The construction, dissemination, and spread of this agenda involve the decisive participation of international organizations, as well as regional organizations and non-governmental institutions, including think tanks, foundations, philanthropists, companies and other stakeholders in the governance in education.

UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD are key actors within this framework and have, over time, acted – sometimes complementarily, sometimes divergently – to build consensus on education and development and to guide educational policies. Elfert and Ydesen (2023), in a recent study on the nature of the three IOs, highlight that UNESCO is grounded in a humanistic vision, linked to the human rights framework, understanding education as a common good, essential for building solidarity, world peace and sustainable development. In contrast, the OECD and the World Bank, more aligned with dominant political economy, view education as an instrument of global competition, as a means to an end: productivity. The authors point out that these blocks of ideational constructions – both the idealistic and the economic – merge in a strong belief in education as a vehicle for progress (Elfert; Ydesen 2023).

Robertson (2016) notes that, in the post-World War II period, the prevailing logic can be framed as a thin global governance of education, as the role of international actors was essentially to structure a normative understanding of educational development worldwide, a task that was to be carried out by the countries themselves. What was being globalized was primarily a particular idea of education, that came to dominate the Western world. This would change from the 1990s onward, with IOs developing a broad repertoire of governance of education technologies, which fundamentally involve statistical reasoning (or the datafication of education), rankings (competitive comparative strategies) and benchmarking (referencing and dissemination of best practices), converging with neoliberal rationality and implying a thickening global governance of education. It is also in this process that UNESCO, identified as an organization with a more philosophical and intellectual approach, loses ground to the World Bank and the OECD, which expand their educational authorities through the technification of policy, adopting an evidence-based approach, as we will outline below.

First, it is important to highlight that the three IOs enjoy an apparent ideological neutrality and have acquired the status of expert organizations, which grants them legitimacy in the global policy-shaping process and strongly contributes to the justification of educational reforms at the national levels. Grek (2016) classifies them as knowledge actors and infers that their roles in the production, control, and distribution of knowledge have had a crucial impact on achieving consensus and decision-making on education in the contemporary world, precisely because of this expectation of technicity and depoliticization. Furthermore, educational data have often been mobilized by IOs as malleable and mobile entities, rather than fixed ones. In this way, they function as boundary objects capable of producing different interpretations and legitimizing or justifying various policies and practices at national levels, depending on the conveniences and specificities of the host countries (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023).

Statistics are an indispensable component of this framework and are increasingly employed in a more intense and sophisticated manner, shaping a stage of datafication of education, in which policies are primarily oriented by data. Historically, as Robertson (2022) recounts, UNESCO developed educational statistics as early as the 1950s, with an approach that favored understanding the inputs and the state of education worldwide, monitoring information related, for example, to enrollment numbers, teachers, classrooms, years of schooling, and so on.

However, from the 1990s onward, the OECD takes on a hegemonic role as the leading agency for educational statistics and evaluation, adopting an approach that emphasizes results, in line with the New Public Management agenda. The OECD rapidly expanded the production of indicators that highlight the performance of educational systems, with particular emphasis on its annual statistical report, *Education at a Glance*, published since 1992, and its Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), created in 2000 and administered every three years. Specifically, regarding PISA, it is worth noting that its significant popularity³ is also due to the support of the World Bank, which, through loans and grants, encouraged and, in some cases, coerced countries to participate in what is now the largest large-scale educational assessment in the world (Elfert; Ydesen 2023).

In this context, numbers are considered an expression of the truth, guaranteeing accuracy and impartiality regarding national educational scenarios and serving as strategic elements for advocating change. However, Lindblad, Petterson, and Popkewitz (2020) point out that “while the numbers *act* as real, they incorporate implicit choices about *what to measure, how to measure, how often to measure and how to present and interpret the results*” (Lindblad; Petterson; Popkewitz, 2020, p. 18, authors emphasis).

Thus, the diagnoses produced by the OECD align with the principles of neoliberal rationality and the knowledge economy, informing countries about their educational systems’ ability to develop the skills and competencies needed to boost their competitiveness in the global landscape. Under the guise of technocracy, numbers also function as anticipatory devices, once “measurement is not only descriptive but also prescriptive as it always invokes a desired course of action” pointing not simply to a probable future, “but also (or perhaps predominantly), a future that is desired” (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023, p. 2).

³ A total of 81 countries participated in the last PISA assessment, in 2022.

Moreover, governance technologies based on numbers represent a crucial comparative shift, as the focus is no longer on understanding education and how educational issues are addressed in different contexts, but rather on using numbers to rank and hierarchize educational systems, establishing a competitive comparison at a global level (Lindblad; Petterson; Popkewitz, 2020). This ranking process – which indicates high- and low-performing educational systems and is updated through periodic data collection – keeps countries in a state of constant tension. In this sense, Robertson (2016) suggests that competitive comparison, by continually placing each participant in a hierarchical relationship with the others, functions as a driving force behind the global governance of education. She emphasizes that:

It is not a question of striving to reach a state of quality, as much as striving to move ahead of who is in front. This technology for global governing is given an ongoing injection of energy in that global data and rankings structure and trade in “urgency”; in the fear of a loss of height, in shame, and in humiliation. Conversely, countries can follow the path to the “holy grail” by following the policy advice of the OECD and the Bank, and buying the necessary services, which in turn will create vertical movement upward. This only increases the hand of the global agencies, whose diagnosis and prognosis are part of a virtual circle between framing, representing, materializing, institutionalizing, and reproducing the modern teacher (Robertson, 2016, p. 287, author emphasis).

In summary, the statistics, indicators and comparative frameworks generated are considered stable scientific facts for planning and intervening in the educational field, in a process in which the mechanical objectivity of numbers eliminates judgment and mitigates subjectivities, unequivocally indicating the paths that should be followed by countries committed to development (Popkewitz, 2020). Other data-derived products contribute to the dissemination of the imagined future within the new educational paradigm – such as reports, consultants and thematic forums organized by IOs – which, based on quantified references, establish “‘narrative scaffolding’ for the policy stories to be told – stories of improvement, mobilization and hope for the future, but also stories of urgency (‘by 2030’) and even dystopia and death” in the case of systems that do not strive enough or deviate from the evidence-based recommendations (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023, p. 12, authors emphasis).

One of the key mechanisms in this context refers to benchmarking, with the production of narratives about successful practices. The strategy involves addressing deviations in the global education framework by selecting and presenting case studies of countries that have improved their performance. Ironically, by establishing the uniqueness of one nation’s experience, differences between others are erased, leading to the belief that there are common solutions to educational problems worldwide (Popkewitz, 2020). This mechanism supports the idea that knowledge about the policies and practices that generate better outcomes is accessible to all, so that any country could reach the top by applying the lessons learned from other nations.

As empirical evidence, benchmarking connects policies and practices that work in order to ensure the desired changes. Grek, Tichenor and Bandola-Gill (2023) warn that the more dramatic and dystopian the stories, the more urgent and impossible to refuse the call to action becomes. They state that creating narrative coherence is essential for the global governance environment in education:

Thus, narratives should not be examined as separate from number-making; on the contrary, we see numerical data as key in the construction of narratives about the construction of ideal worlds through quantified knowledge. Narratives, through bringing together discursive, numerical and visual elements, become powerful materialities of persuasion and consensus-making, as well as prime tools in fusing numbers, values and futures together (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023, p. 11).

It is, therefore, through the structured and coordinated use of information, comparison, and persuasion mechanisms that we observe the expansion of IOs' influence in the multi-regulation of education. However, the phenomenon of the densification of the global governance of education does not occur in a radical manner, nor does it forge major upheavals in the educational guidelines and foundations at national and local levels. As Ball (2016) asserts:

Rather, reform is made up of small, incremental moves and tactics, a ratchet of initiatives and programmes that introduce new possibilities and innovations into policy and practice which, once established, make further moves thinkable and doable, and ultimately make them obvious and indeed necessary. Things that at one time seemed unthinkable become over time the common sense and the obvious of policy, as 'what works' and as 'best practice'; they become embedded in a 'necessarian logic', most commonly in relation to the necessities of international economic competitiveness (Ball, 2016, p. 1048, author emphasis).

In other words, what is transformed is primarily the rationality underlying educational systems, and this change occurs in a gradual and cumulative manner, permeating governments, institutions and individuals. In this sense, the next section of this article aims to discuss the effects of the new educational paradigm on the teaching profession, highlighting some of the technologies mobilized by the three IOs – UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD – in this movement. The premise is that the primary focus on performance, the spread of an educational audit culture and the emphasis on the development of evidence-based policy have called into question teachers' knowledge and competence, legitimizing the need for a restructuring of the profession.

International Organizations and the teaching profession

Robertson (2016) argues that, until the late 1990s, there was a weak global influence on the teaching profession. Although international actors helped shape the debate on education, the greater volume of power and authority for regulating the profession resided at the national levels, with local governments and teacher unions. However, as education takes on centrality in the new global political configuration, being viewed as a fundamental field for shaping young people with the skills and competencies required by the so-called knowledge economy, the professionalism of teachers begins to be challenged.

Especially since the 2000s, it has been observed that teachers have been positioned by IOs as the most important factor for improving the performance of educational systems, so that policies and projects have been directed towards controlling their work and, ultimately, reconfiguring their identity (Saraiva and Souza 2020). There is a global concern regarding the profession, encompassing everything from recruitment and training to ways of monitoring teacher performance and

incentive structures that can reward and retain the best teachers, meaning those who demonstrate effectiveness in promoting better student learning outcomes.

This emphasis on teacher accountability is fueled by large-scale assessments, which identify good teachers and, intertwined with other instruments, suggest best practices and set out goals to be achieved. This process is built around strategic ambiguity, so that teachers' professional competence is sometimes placed on a pedestal and at other times pathologized:

In many cases, legitimizing and delegitimizing discourses are simultaneously propagated by the same institutions, actors and networks. The same empowerment discourses that aim to free teachers from bureaucratic constraints seen as interference in *quality teaching* also provoke their own tyranny of regulatory restrictions (Sobe, 2019, p. 17, author emphasis).

In this sense, it becomes relevant to highlight narratives driven by UNESCO, the World Bank, and the OECD in the regulation and restructuring of the teaching profession, even without the ambition to explore the entire arsenal of instruments that the three institutions mobilize on the topic. With governance technologies that differ from one another, whether at the level of discourse or the level of effects, IOs set the agenda in the global landscape for the fabrication or codification of the "good" teacher in the context of the knowledge economy.

UNESCO

Although UNESCO has seen its influence diminish in recent decades due to its more normative and humanistic identity, it remains a relevant actor, especially for its role in monitoring goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed upon within the United Nations, which points to the purpose of "assuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 15).

Attention to teachers is reflected in goal 4c, which positions teachers as key to achieving the full Education 2030 agenda and stipulates that by the referred year there should be a "substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training, in developing countries, especially in the least developed countries and small island developing States" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 21).

In the 2030 Agenda, UNESCO continues its more philosophical and idealistic approach, stating that it is inspired by "a humanistic vision of education and development, based on principles of human rights and dignity, social justice, peace, inclusion and protection, as well as cultural, linguistic and ethnic diversity, *shared accountability and responsibility*" (UNESCO, 2016, p. 24, our emphasis).

The last two expressions in this statement of principles are noteworthy. Since ideas, compared to numbers, are more inherently political and can be less effective, the IO adds to its statute typical technologies of New Public Management, in a hybrid discourse that blends empowerment and control. In the preamble of the Incheon Declaration, for example, the association between student performance and teachers' professional competence becomes evident:

We are committed to *quality education* and *improving learning outcomes*, which requires strengthening inputs and processes, as well as *assessing learning outcomes* and *mechanisms*

to measure progress. We will ensure that teachers and educators are empowered, adequately recruited, well trained, professionally qualified, motivated and supported in systems that have good resources and are *efficient* and *effectively managed*. (UNESCO, 2016, p. 8, our emphasis).

Thus, throughout the document, there is an incorporation of the new global governance of education lexicon, without, however, abandoning the ethical perspectives of shaping a better world. Grek, Tichenor and Bandola-Gill (2023) note that the SDGs constitute a project for building a quantified future, which is combined with the utopia of a sustainable world, interrelating idealism and pragmatism. They point out that, through the production of specific and quantifiable objectives and targets, countries are materially engaged in the narrative of building a wonderful educational future for all. They point out that, through the production of specific and quantifiable objectives and goals, countries are materially involved in the narrative of building a wonderful educational future for all. In this context, numbers have an essential role as the foundation for projecting ambitious political futures and, “by quantifying these futures, actors in this field establish a common utopia whose progress towards which can be carefully measured, as well as demand accountability to stay on track” (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023, p. 6).

It is also worth highlighting that the construction and monitoring of the SDGs present an important discontinuity in relation to the production of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which preceded them. The SDGs merged the technical with the democratic, expanding the spaces for discussion, negotiation and reconstitution of consensus around objectives, goals and indicators. One criticism of the MDGs referred to their hierarchical architecture, in which a small group of powerful actors (such as the United States, the European Union and Japan) should guide the changes to be promoted in poor countries (Grek; Tichenor; Bandola-Gill, 2023). The 2030 Agenda highlights that its novelty consists of being “universal and belonging to the entire world, both developed and developing countries” (UNESCO, 2016, p. 25). This is due to the fact that the construction of SDG 4 involved a large number of people, institutions and countries, contributing to everyone feeling like they were the authors and co-responsible for its achievement.

Regarding target 4-c, the role of the International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 (TTF) stands out in ensuring synergy at national, regional and global levels on issues related to teaching. Created under the auspices of UNESCO, the TTF classifies itself as a unique and independent global alliance whose members⁴ include national governments, think tanks, civil society organizations and the private sector. These actors meet periodically in Policy Dialogue Forums, which aim “to have an impact on country policies, reflections and debates”, based on the premise that “there is a global shortage of teachers, and particularly qualified ones” (TTF, 2024, n.p). These events discuss topics such as teacher training, monitoring and evaluation of professional teacher development, teacher motivation, accountability, innovation, leadership, among others (Saraiva and Souza 2020). Another priority area of action for TTF consists of learning about national and regional policies, through

⁴ The TTF has 167 members: national governments represented by designated officials (103, including Brazil); intergovernmental organizations at global, regional or subregional level and United Nations agencies (20); international non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and global teachers’ organizations (31); bilateral and multilateral international development agencies (4); private sector organizations and foundations (9) (TTF, 2024, n.p).

a continuous benchmarking exercise to detect best practices that can be emulated “between countries, within and across regions” (TTF, 2022, p. 6).

Transnational networks, such as the TTF, highlight a new type of arrangement with an increasing impact on the governance of education. Ball (2014) notes that the activities of these networks occur both in traditional spaces for policy circulation and formulation and beyond them, blurring the boundaries between the State, the economy and civil society. In general, political networks, whether institutionalized or not, seek to engage with complex social problems and evoke solutions aligned with the rhetoric of neoliberalism and New Public Management. They gain adherence also through the apparent horizontality among the various groups that comprise them, which dilutes the perception of power among educational elites and fosters the idea of a broad collective agreement.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that although UNESCO’s apparatus has been recalibrated in recent years with discourses and practices typical of technicism and managerialism, the IO remains an important counterpoint to the economic and instrumental approach to education. The latest major report published by the organization, titled “Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education”, updates the belief in education as a means to transform the world and reiterates it as the primary pathway to address inequalities, as well as supporting the valuing of teachers and the involvement of the teaching profession in political spaces that seek to shape the future of education (UNESCO, 2022). It remains to be seen how the other actors involved in the multi-regulation of education will appropriate/adapt such norms.

World Bank

The World Bank’s involvement in the field of education began in the 1960s⁵, with the provision of educational loans to developing countries. The credit activities were initially focused on vocational, technical and secondary education, which were considered essential for training and qualifying professionals for economic development (Elfert; Ydesen 2023). It was from the 1970s onwards that the World Bank transitioned from being merely a financier of education to becoming a producer of knowledge and expanding its influence in the global governance of education, assuming a coercive status in this agenda:

By tying educational funding for developing countries to conditions and policy directions, most infamously with its structural adjustment programmes, the World Bank has become both “juge et partie” (judge and party) in education policy making (Elfert; Ydesen, 2023, p. 25, author emphasis).

With the dual role of financier and political advisor, the Bank’s directives began to have a strong impact on all levels of education in developing countries, particularly in the regions of Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Among the proposed measures, in line with the recommendations of the Washington Consensus (1989), the prioritization of investments in primary education, the

⁵ The World Bank granted its first educational loan to Tunisia, in 1962 (Elfert; Ydesen, 2023).

opening of the education sector to privatization and the increasing imposition of charges on students and families, especially in higher education, were particularly noteworthy (Elfert; Ydesen 2023).

Regarding the formulations on the teaching profession, positioning itself as a technical organization, the World Bank claims authority to criticize and prescribe political changes and pedagogical practices that can define the “good” teacher, relying on supposed evidence. A classic example of this approach is the 2011 publication of the book “Making Schools Work: New Evidence on Accountability Reforms”, which employs neoliberal managerial rhetoric to portray teachers as a “threat” to the development of quality education. As stated in the introduction of the work:

This book is about the *threats* to education quality that cannot be explained by lack of resources. [...] a root cause of low-quality and inequitable public services – not only in education – is the weak “*accountability*” of providers to both their supervisors and their clients. It provides a *rationale* for the focus on the three key lines of reform: [1] drills into the global experience with *information reforms* – policies that use *the power of information* to strengthen the ability of clients of education services (students and their parents) to hold providers accountable for results. [2] analyzes the experience with *school-based management* reforms – policies that increase schools’ autonomy to make key decisions and control resources. [...] [3] reviews *the evidence* on two key types of *teacher incentive reforms* – policies that aim to make teachers more accountable for results, either *by making contract tenure dependent on performance*, or *by offering performance-linked pay* (Bruns; Filmer; Patrino, 2011, p. 2-3, our emphasis).

The publication blames teachers and, to some extent, absolves the State of responsibility for poor educational performance, proposing as solutions the intensification of datafication and the consequent material accountability of teachers by linking career advancement and remuneration to student performance on large-scale assessments. This logic of auditing and holding teachers accountable erodes trust in the category and can affect professional legitimacy based on ethical principles and professional and collegial judgment, as Ball (2016) points out. The author also warns that as teachers adapt to the challenges of reporting and recording their practices, sociability and social relationships are replaced by informational structures, so that “we all know and value others by their outputs rather than by their individuality and humanity” (Ball, 2016, p. 1054).

One of the important technologies of the World Bank in producing comparative data to justify policy recommendations is the Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER). Launched in 2011, SABER focuses on global knowledge on education policies, distinguishing it from other international surveys. Its development was based on the principle that “knowing inputs and outcomes is not enough”, because what matters most is “how efficiently resources are used to improve learning, which depends fundamentally on education policies and their implementation” (Banco Mundial, 2013a, p. 10).

The information collected by SABER covers thirteen topics⁶, in an effort for “a thorough review of the global evidence that identifies the policies and institutions that matter most in promoting

⁶ 1. Early childhood development; 2. Educational Management Information System; 3. Educational Resilience; 4. Partnerships with the private sector; 5. Equity and Inclusion; 6. Information and Communication Technologies; 7. School autonomy and accountability; 8. School financing; 9. School Health and Nutrition; 10. Student assessment; 11. Teachers; 12. Higher Education; 13. Professional development.

learning for all” (Banco Mundial, 2024, n. p). In the topic on teachers, SABER’s conceptual framework aims to map which policies are most important for improving teacher effectiveness and student outcomes, gathering information related to key dimensions such as initial training; recruitment and employment status; workload; autonomy; remuneration; professional development; retirement; teacher monitoring and evaluation; representation and voice of teachers; and school leadership. Once the teaching policy scenarios have been configured, SABER is concerned, for example, with guiding reforms that can contribute “to motivate teachers”, which would result in an “effective teaching” (Banco Mundial, 2013b, p. 34). In this sense, it lists three “policy levers” for professional incentive that reproduce the logic of accountability: i) linking career opportunities to teacher performance; ii) having mechanisms to hold teachers accountable; iii) linking teachers’ remuneration to performance (Banco Mundial, 2013b). There are also a series of recommendations regarding training and professional development, which are generally more pragmatic and less reflective.

In this type of approach, as argued by Molstad, Pettersson and Proitz (2019), teachers are viewed as “indicators of the educational system’s effectiveness and as important for raising performance standards” (Molstad; Pettersson; Proitz, 2019, p. 27), being discussed “increasingly less as subjects and more as objects that can be modified” (Molstad; Pettersson; Proitz, 2019, p. 34). Thus, a more functionalist version of the teacher is produced, seen as the implementer of structured guidelines (Ball, 2016).

The SABER database also feeds other World Bank tools that aim to “guide policy decisions” and monitor educational progress at the national levels – including consultancies, publications and a Global Education Policy Dashboard (GEPD) – that link evidence, policies and practices (Banco Mundial, 2024, n. p). Although the World Bank remains a strong actor in the multi-regulation of education, the rigidity of its economic discourse and the new geopolitical configurations with the rise of the Global South may require adjustments to its identity in the future (Elfert; Ydesen 2023).

OECD

The OECD’s actions in the educational field since its beginnings have been based on the Human Capital Theory and on a social engineering mentality that persists to this day (Elfert; Ydesen, 2023). Understood as the main actor in the process of global governance of education in contemporary times, the IO contributed to the establishment of a common lexicon of educational policies based on its technologies of production and dissemination of knowledge, with a hyper-rationalist and technicist approach.

Having PISA one of its main tools, the OECD does not limit itself to conducting assessments and providing data, but also produces interpretations and policy recommendations that travel internationally. Elfert and Ydesen (2023) point out that, over time, the institution has developed communication and marketing skills that ensure that specialized knowledge is translated in a way that is understandable to governments, media, schools and other stakeholders in education, with an ostensible ability to connect with dominant political discourses and shape common sense. The results orientation, competitive comparative rankings and the use of benchmarking build an

evidence-based narrative that is difficult to escape, giving the OECD a high power of pressure and persuasion.

With regards to teaching, the discourse of the IO is filled with ambiguities, at times praising, at times criticizing teachers for student performance. In contrast, its repertoire of recommendations regarding the profession has been developed in a rather organic manner, shaping a new conception of teaching tied to the idea of performativity. Besides the results of PISA, another key instrument in developing this narrative is the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)⁷, conducted with teachers and school principals since 2008, covering topics such as student learning, teacher beliefs and classroom practices, evaluation of their work, school leadership, job satisfaction, among other topics. According to the OECD, TALIS provides a global “selfie” of teachers and aims to give voice to the teaching profession:

TALIS relies on teachers’ and school leaders’ expertise as professionals to describe their work situation as accurately as possible, as well as their experiences in and feelings about their schools and working conditions. It is not an assessment, but a self-reported survey (OCDE, 2024, n.p).

However, Sorensen and Robertson (2020) point out that teachers have a low degree of control over the process and that the collected data has been used to “frame, measure and sell a particular type of teacher; one who is flexible, prioritizes constructivism as a pedagogical approach and uses *evidence* to make teaching and learning decisions” (Sorensen; Robertson, 2020, p. 44, authors emphasis). The authors argue that there is a contradiction in this framing of the quality teacher, as the set of prescriptions resulting from TALIS limits their possibilities for interpretation and action.

In this context, two outcomes of the Survey play an important role: the International Summits on the Teaching Profession, which drive political debate on the restructuring of the profession; and the Teachers’ Guide to TALIS, which deepens the OECD’s action in local micro spaces, drawing itself closer to the classrooms. The Summits have been held annually since 2011, creating spaces for the systematization of conclusions and recommendations on teacher policies, functioning as a high-level political network that includes the participation of education ministers, experts, representatives of other IOs – among them, the Education International (EI), a global teachers’ union – as well as leaders of educational foundations and other invited guests.

Sorensen and Robertson (2020) state that, despite the seemingly democratic setup of the Summits, given the asymmetric power of the participants, the capacity of organizations like EI to shape these settings is limited. Furthermore, the use of evidence serves to depoliticize the debate, hindering the development and collective negotiation of alternative arrangements to achieve the goal of “improving teacher quality”. Among the central topics discussed in the meetings are issues such as: teacher adherence to reforms, bonus systems, preparing teachers for 21st-century skills, teacher evaluation procedures, accountability, using assessments to improve teaching, skills and qualities of successful teachers etc. (Saraiva and Souza 2020). In the latest editions, agendas related

⁷ The first edition of TALIS was held in 2008 in 24 countries. The second cycle, in 2013, included 38 countries; the third, in 2018, included 48 countries. The fourth cycle of the survey is scheduled for 2024.

to inclusion, sustainability, professional recognition, education for global and cultural competencies, and civic engagement have been included, highlighting a flexibility in the managerial narrative.

Regarding the Teachers' Guide, it aims to provide insights and advice to teachers on how they can improve teaching and learning in the schools where they work. Sorensen and Robertson (2020, p. 52) point out that the instrument is part of a "broader [OCDE] strategy to reach teachers and school leaders directly, acknowledging that the main instruments of TALIS are unlikely to be read [by them]". The structure of the Teachers' Guide 2018, linked to the latest edition of the Survey, follows the institution's standard, presenting data in infographics, brief interpretations and recommendations on the issue, followed by a variety of practical examples from States that stand out for their performance (OCDE, 2018). In just 28 pages, the publication covered experiences from thirteen countries⁸, referencing practices that range from Korea to the United States, including Kazakhstan. This evokes the idea that there are global solutions to educational problems, applicable to various territories.

As Ball (2016) emphasizes, performativity systems seek to anticipate and replace teachers' reflective judgment on the best pedagogical choices with a set of already validated external responses, making teaching activities more calculable and predictable; however, less creative and innovative. Moreover, the evaluation culture associated with accountability and reward policies can lead professionals to distance themselves from activities that do not have immediate measurable performance outcomes. This scenario poses a challenge to the fundamental principles of autonomy and the intellectual nature that underpin the teaching profession, shaping its practices and producing new relationships, subjectivities and identities.

Finally, Li and Auld (2020) emphasize the adaptive and evolving identity of the OECD, which demonstrates a rapid capacity to respond to transformations in the global geopolitical, cultural and economic order. According to the authors, it is possible to observe a "humanistic turn" by the IO since 2011, and especially after 2015, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals agreed upon within the UN system by a large number of countries. On one hand, the organization seems to adopt a more inclusive and comprehensive view of education for development, resulting in an expansion of the scope of PISA metrics to incorporate non-cognitive skills – such as socio-emotional skills, creativity, and well-being – listed by the OECD in a framework of "transformative competencies". On the other hand, the IO also reaffirms its expansive nature by creating new instruments such as the PISA for Development (PISA-D) program, which encourages and facilitates the participation of low- and middle-income countries in large-scale assessments, justifying that the generated data can contribute to monitoring SDG-4 in these contexts. This shift tends to reinforce the OECD's hegemony in global governance of education; as Li and Auld warn, "once the notion that assessment is a human right has been established, the discourse becomes much stronger and very difficult to oppose" (Li; Auld, 2020, p. 511).

⁸ The Teachers' Guide 2018 presents experiences from the following countries/territories, in the order in which they appear in the document: Japan, United States, Portugal, Australia, Kazakhstan, Austria, Canada, Estonia, Sweden, Korea, Singapore, South Africa and Italy.

Final considerations

In recent decades, there has been an intensification of global governance of education, with international organizations developing a sophisticated repertoire of regulatory technologies that shape educational policies according to neoliberal rationality, with the OECD as the protagonist of this movement. There is a common rhetoric regarding the role of education in the knowledge economy, along with a narrative constructed to reinforce the role of teachers as a decisive factor in improving student performance.

Drawing from a robust set of tools that involve statistical reasoning, competitive comparison and the framing of best practices, countries are increasingly persuaded to develop multidimensional evaluation mechanisms and accountability systems that can measure the quality of teaching work, frame their practices and commit them to a results-oriented and evidence-based agenda. This represents a logic of regulating teachers' work centered on performance and audit-ready, performative professional relationships, which poses a challenge to the professionalism and professionalization of teaching, as it affects fundamental principles of their identity – such as autonomy, intellectualism and collegiality – as well as the processes of training and professional development.

Despite the profound transformations that have occurred in the organization and management of educational systems under the neoliberal paradigm, it is important to consider that changes take longer to reach the classroom level. Given that the building of the future is a constant dispute, there is always time for the (re)organization of the fight and resistance of educators, along with unions and professional associations. They must strive to claim and take control of the profession based on ethical principles, committed to the right to education in its entirety – an education aimed at the full development of the individual, their preparation for citizenship and their qualification for work.

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