



Education for Democracy in the Neoliberal Context: University Contributions to Overcome Competitive Subjectivity

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ABSTRACT

This bibliographical article aims to deepen the challenges of a democratic education in a context of hegemony of neoliberal thought, which emphasizes the construction of competitive subjectivities. Neoliberalism is understood here beyond the classically considered assumptions of economic policies that defend a minimal State in the economy and in socio-educational policies. The contributions of Dardot and Laval (2016), Biesta (2013), Dewey (1979), among others, make it possible to broaden the understanding of how neoliberal assumptions enter subjectivities and produce new ways of life. Concepts such as neo-subject, entrepreneur of self, competition, competition, among others, translate these new assumptions. In this context, educational institutions, especially universities, are challenged to problematize these trends and contribute to the construction of humanizing and democratic assumptions. Higher education institutions have an important commitment in the formation of democratic subjects. In conclusion, we reaffirm the thesis that only a democratic education is capable of qualifying the assumptions of sociability in view of a life in common.

KEYWORDS

School education. Democracy. Neoliberalism. Competitive subjectivity. Sociability.

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Educação Para a Democracia no Contexto Neoliberal: Contribuições da Universidade Para Superar a Subjetividade Concorrencial

RESUMO

O presente artigo de natureza bibliográfica objetiva aprofundar os desafios de uma educação democrática num contexto de hegemonia do pensamento neoliberal, que prima pela construção de subjetividades concorrenciais. Entende-se, aqui, o neoliberalismo para além dos pressupostos classicamente considerados de política econômica que defendem um Estado mínimo na economia e nas políticas sócio educacionais. As contribuições de Dardot e Laval (2016), de Biesta (2013), Dewey (1979), entre outros, possibilitam ampliar a compreensão de como os pressupostos neoliberais adentram as subjetividades e produzem novos modos de vida. Conceitos como neo-sujeito, empresário de si, concorrência, competição, entre outros, traduzem esses novos pressupostos. Nesse contexto as instituições educativas, especialmente as Universidades, são desafiadas a problematizar essas tendências e contribuir na construção de pressupostos humanizadores e democráticos. As instituições de ensino superior têm um compromisso importante na formação de sujeitos democráticos. Na conclusão, reafirma-se a tese de que somente uma educação democrática é capaz de qualificar os pressupostos de sociabilidade em vista de uma vida em comum.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Educação escolar. Democracia. Neoliberalismo. Subjetividade concorrencial. Sociabilidade.

Educación para la Democracia en el Contexto Neoliberal: Desafíos Para Superar la Subjetividad Concorrencial

RESUMEN

El presente artículo bibliográfico pretende profundizar en los retos de una educación democrática en un contexto de hegemonía del pensamiento neoliberal, que enfatiza la construcción de subjetividades competitivas. El neoliberalismo se entiende aquí más allá de los supuestos considerados clásicamente de política económica que propugna un estado mínimo en la economía y en las políticas socioeducativas. Los aportes de Dardot y Laval (2016), Biesta (2013), Dewey (1979), entre otros, permiten ampliar la comprensión de cómo los supuestos neoliberales ingresan a las subjetividades y producen nuevas formas de vida. Conceptos como neo-sujeto, empresario del yo, competencia, competición, entre otros, traducen estos nuevos supuestos. En este contexto, las instituciones educativas, especialmente las universidades, tienen el reto de problematizar estas tendencias y contribuir a la construcción de supuestos humanizadores y democráticos. Las instituciones de educación superior tienen un importante compromiso en la formación de sujetos democráticos. En conclusión, reafirmamos la tesis de que sólo una educación democrática es capaz de calificar los supuestos de sociabilidad con vistas a una vida en común.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Educación escolar. La democracia. El neoliberalismo. Subjetividad competitiva. Sociabilidad.

Introduction Remarks

The fundamental thing is to understand that nothing can exempt us from the task of promoting another rationality. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 402)

The article discusses the theme of democratic formation in education, one of the main contemporary challenges. To this end, it is urgent to problematize the neoliberal rationality anchored in performance and based on the principle of competition. This is one of the dominant characteristics in the contemporary scenario in terms of subjectivity that constitutes a culture and translates into ways of life. By diagnosing this trend, it is intended to highlight how reductionist it is, as well as to think about the possibilities of overcoming it through a qualified intervention of the University in the establishment of new assumptions based on democratic principles and the establishment of new sociability, or as Dardot and Laval (2017) state, based on the political principle of the 'common'.

Based on the reflections of Dardot and Laval (2016), a diagnosis will be made regarding the advance of performance or competitive rationality, seeking to identify the assumptions and main characteristics of this way of life that results in a neoliberal subject or neo-subject and its political, cultural, and educational implications. The ongoing transformations aggressively emphasize the virtues of competition as the principle that will allow the most skilled and powerful to achieve personal success. Hence the emphasis on pedagogies of prosperity based on meritocracy that focus strictly on the individual as a possibility for social ascension. The other, in this case, is a competitor and an enemy. In the context of this dispute, the spaces for a democratic, dialogic, and humanizing education are deprived or emptied. This logic has been entering the educational institutions, especially in higher education, creating a climate of animosity among the institutions themselves. The solidarity relations that should guide these republican educational institutions are catapulted by competitive relations that are often deeply unethical and immoral.

In this context of destruction of democratic assumptions, we are challenged to dialogue with authors who have based their reflections on democratic formation and the role of educational institutions, especially those of higher education, and the contribution of research in this process. The democratic formation as we propose to discuss here is anchored in the contributions of Biesta and, particularly, of Dewey (1979, p. 93), when he defends his thesis that ward "is more than a form of government; it is, primarily, a form of associated life, of joint and mutually communicated experience. From this perspective, an understanding of democracy that goes far beyond participation in elective processes of representatives results. Therefore, it implies educational processes, that is, there is no democracy without training for democracy and without democratic subjects. All this implies the formation of critical subjects, researchers and citizens.

Education for democracy occurs in multiple spaces, but formal spaces constitute, according to Benevides (1996, 223-237), privileged spaces for this formation. This same thesis is defended by Biesta, in the work 'Beyond learning: democratic education for a human future' (2013), and by Dewey in 'Democracy and Education' (1979). Confronting the market

logic that penetrates socio-political and cultural relations and subjectivities will only be successful when education is able to prepare people capable of living socially with others. Thus, a first movement to be made is to problematize the nature of education itself, conceived as a process of mediation between people and rational communities, that is, it is fundamental to think of education as an open space in which democracy is experienced from multiple initiatives and in which the relationships between subjects are built based on dialog. In this process, research that is developed in different spaces in higher education institutions, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, gains relevance.

The movement that consolidated the rationality of performance, elevating it to a hegemonic position today is the result of historical struggles, and therefore, it is also subject to change. In this sense, it is fundamental to think about other forms of rationality that can also be developed in society, especially in educational institutions, and in the constitution of new subjectivities. In this aspect, formal education at all levels and modalities has a primordial formative role, even though it is not exclusive. Education must provide positive environments for coexistence with diversity and prepare people to live together socially. As Durkheim (1967) stated, education has a fundamental role in the constitution of the social being, that is, to constitute a moral basis that provides conditions for people to live together socially.

Performance Rationality as a Contemporary Way of Life

The constitution of the capitalist mode of production in its different phases and characteristics occurred through multiple clashes. Thompson is, certainly, one of the historians who contributes qualitatively to the understanding of how bourgeois capitalists, particularly in England of the eighteenth century, forged in multiple ways new ways of life and competitive sociability in opposition to the values derived from the tradition of a popular culture. In this respect, one can highlight, among others, two works: 'Customs in common: studies on traditional popular culture' (1998) and 'Lords and hunters: the origin of Black law' (1987). His investigations showed that capitalism is much more than a mode of production of economic goods by highlighting the moral dimension of the new order being built in 18th century England. Control, time discipline and competition constitute, for capitalism, fundamental principles. Progressively, the logic of the market and of the capitalist productive organization advanced over subjectivities, transforming individuals into competitive beings, guided by a competitive logic of performance. Thus, we reach the 21st century with a progressive destruction of the foundations of a sociability based on democratic principles.

The work of Dardot and Laval: 'The New Reason of the World: Essays on Neoliberal Society' (2016) is an important reference for a diagnosis of the ongoing transformations in the neoliberal stage of today's society. Without disregarding the multiple ways in which neoliberalism enters the socio-educational policies and transforms the State into its agent, these authors highlight how the logics of individualistic performance configure competitive and competitive beings that, in turn, deepen competitive subjectivities and how they compose new ways of life that mobilize subjects to action.

Mechanisms and Strategies of Constitution of the New Subjectivity

The challenge lies in understanding neoliberalism beyond the political-economic assumptions in defense of the "minimal State", that is, how it constitutes a mainstreaming culture by a competitive rationality. The challenge, therefore, is to unveil under what conditions and how the formation of the neoliberal subject takes place and the transformation of competition into an absolute principle, extended to all areas of life, from economic transactions to daily personal relationships and subjectivities. Education in a broad sense is not immune to these influences. In this task, Dardot and Laval (2016) suggest escaping from two traps: the one that makes one believe it is a subjectivity that has naturally configured itself, without "strategic intervention," and the one that sustains the existence of a pro-market plot, resulting from a predetermination of pre-programmed puppets. "The normative logic that ended up being imposed was constituted over the course of initially uncertain battles and often groping policies" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 24).

Observing the facts in their historicity helps to perceive how actors who interpret the scenario and act strategically have a greater chance of making their interests prevail in the clashes in which they are involved. The strategies employed in the formation of the neoliberal subject were efficient, creating conditions to transform subjectivity and convincing people to act based on calculation and individual interest. "The originality of neoliberalism lies in the fact that it creates a new set of rules that define not only 'another regime of accumulation' but also, more broadly, another society" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 24). The participation of the state in creating pro-market conditions and constituting the "ruthless commodification of all society" was fundamental.

To understand neoliberalism *politically* presupposes understanding the nature of the social and political project it has represented and promoted since 1930. It brings in itself a very particular idea of democracy, which, in many respects, derives from an *antidemocratic*: private law should be exempted from any deliberation and any control, even in the form of universal suffrage. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 8)

The specific type of capitalism, transformed into competitive rationality, is the result of confrontations with different political-economic perspectives and was consolidated on the basis of strategic actions designed to respond to particular historical circumstances. Taking advantage of the sense of exhaustion of the Welfare State, which had responded well in the post-World War II period in which it was implemented, the neoliberal assumptions found favorable ground. The crisis of the 1970s was a "golden opportunity" for the concretization of these new assumptions. The intervention strategies initially reached some governments and the actions aimed at reducing the role of the State, progressively gaining spatial amplitude, as well as distinct dimensions of life, constituting a new subjectivity, that is, a new way of life.

Neoliberalism is often reduced to an economic policy that defends a minimal State in the realm of socio-educational policies. Contrary to what common sense assumes, neoliberalism has promoted a strong State and has become a guardian of private law. Boaventura de Sousa Santos states that the neoliberal advance needs a strong State in order to

weaken the State itself. He deals with a dilemma of the state in the neoliberal context, since it needs to produce its own weakening, that is, "a strong state is necessary to produce this weakness efficiently and sustain it coherently" (2008, p. 329). The transformations caused in the welfare state by the neoliberal advance have intensely contributed to strengthen the formation of a competitive and performance subject, resulting in a culture based on the logic of competition, based on a business logic. The production of evaluative rankings among courses and educational institutions, particularly in higher education institutions, in practically all spheres of society has had the fundamental contribution of the State and multilateral organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank (WB), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). These institutions became instruments of pressure to promote the principles of the neoliberal market, financing in a conditioned way some public policies, intermediating negotiations of foreign debts of peripheral countries at high interest rates, forcing them to follow the rules established by the Washington Consensus with its proposals for structural adjustment (GENTILI, 1998). The discourse based on the idea of saving countries from the crisis hid what reality came to show: the deepening of social inequalities.

In the world of work, ideological clashes have also occurred with great repercussions in the pro-market logic and in the precariousness of labor relations with deep impacts on subjectivities, as well analyzed by Antunes (1999; 2005) and Sennett (2005). The substitution of legislation with some labor guarantees for flexible relations has produced a weakening of collective organizations and reinforced individual responsibility for working conditions and employability. In this logic, fighting unemployment should not be a concern of the government or the State, since society is ruled by competition. The labor regime enters the logics of systems of rewards, punishments and stimuli, proper of a market guided by choices and individual conduct (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 217). A meritocratic ideology prevails that conceives labor rights as inhibiting personal initiative and promoting social accommodation. The clash leaves the field of economics and goes to the field of morality, to the extent that this new context holds the individual solely responsible for success or failure. The possibility of choice and the promotion of personal initiative are constitutive of the new subjectivity.

This control of subjectivity is only operated effectively within a flexible labor market context, in which the threat of unemployment is on the horizon of every wage earner. [...] The height of self-control, which also shows the perverse mechanism that transforms each one into an "instrument of oneself," occurs when the wage earner is invited to define not only the goals he must achieve, but also the criteria by which he wants to be judged. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 229. Authors' emphasis)

Flexible work is supported by an ideology that propagates worker participation, freedom to make choices, and the reduction of hierarchical controls. In practice, there is the internalization of norms of productive efficiency and individual performance, the use of new technologies of accounting, registration and communication, and the reduction of boundaries between inside and outside the company from subcontracting and outsourcing (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 226). The strategy is to expand as much as possible market situations to

lead the individual to make his choices assuming that the rules of the game are given and that the calculation is based on personal interest. In this way, it is "impossible to conceive of a subject who is not active, calculating, on the lookout for the best opportunities" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 223). As the individual internalizes the "desire to win" he naturally enters the game of competition and the consequences are transformed into new demands to win the award. It is like a game where passing the phase implies extra difficulties and the desire to overcome is the mobilizing fuel.

The subjects would never have "converted" voluntarily or spontaneously to the industrial and mercantile society just because of the propaganda of free trade or the attractions of private enrichment. It was necessary to think and implement, "by a strategy without strategists," the types of education of the mind, control of the body, organization of work, housing, rest, and leisure that would be the institutional form of the new ideal of man, at once a calculating individual and a productive worker. It was this efficiency device that provided economic activity with the necessary "human resources"; it was this device that incessantly produced the minds and bodies capable of functioning in the great circuit of production and consumption. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 324. Authors' emphasis)

A brief incursion through history shows that capitalism has been imposing itself, but with a lot of resistance. The fact is that progressively there is a domination of capital over individuals that occurs through pressures, but also through discourses that use symbolic force. The discourse of meritocracy instrumentalized by the defenders of neoliberalism throws all the responsibility for social ascension or failure exclusively on the individual, removing from the scene the multiple components present. Thus, there is excessive pressure on the individual to secure employment and living conditions. It is in this context of pressure that many individuals incorporate the principles of entrepreneurship to adapt to the new world, basing their decisions on the calculation of personal interest. Thus, a new subjectivity is established and a new subject is constituted.

The Action of the Subject Guided by Performance Rationality

The neoliberal, competitive, or performance-oriented subject is not the result, as we try to show, of a simple personal decision. How are the changes that have been occurring processed to the point of forging a new subject? As Dardot and Laval state,

If there is a new subject, it must be distinguished in the discursive and institutional practices that, at the end of the twentieth century, engendered the figure of the businessman or the 'business subject,' favoring the establishment of a network of sanctions, stimuli, and commitments that have the effect of producing psychic workings of a new kind. (2016, p. 322. Authors' emphasis)

For the authors, the changes that have occurred since the end of the 20th century result in the emergence of a new subject that assumes for himself all the risks of success or failure. The notion of "self-entrepreneur" creates the illusion that everything that can happen is within the reach of individual decisions. The problem is that calculating ability is not enough, since competition is growing among individuals often competing for the same spaces.

Consequently, not everyone can win. Discourses that support these new logics exacerbate individual meritocracy, configuring a predatory subjectivity of possible enemies and accentuating, in individuals, tension and anxiety (SENNETT, 2005; HAN, 2017a, 2017b; ANTUNES, 2005).

For Dardot and Laval, "the productive subject was the great work of industrial society" (2016, p. 326. Authors' emphasis). In historical terms, the emergence of this new subject stems from transformations that gradually take place, since capitalism as a mode of production changes the forms of capital accumulation, the precariousness of work and living conditions. The imposition of a utilitarian way of managing work and of acting based on calculation and personal interest is based on foundations of Law and Social Policies, that is, the norm of economic efficiency continues mixed with other theoretical conceptions, gaining homogeneity around the productive rationality and advancement of the concept of "company man", which gains centrality with the historical consolidation of neoliberalism (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 326).

What emerges again in the neoliberal context is "the competitive man, entirely immersed in global competition" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 322. Author's emphasis). This subject assumes for himself the responsibility for his own education and his destiny. Not that he can by himself produce himself without the existence of minimum conditions. However, this new individual is morally pressured to make choices, to make his decisions, obviously assuming, exclusively, the consequences of such options. But what makes this "new" man to venture out is, above all, a pseudo-freedom to make choices, to plan his future, to seek the best techniques available in the market to expand his human capital and get the best opportunities, projecting himself actively and engaging in the search for fulfillment in all dimensions of life. He is a subject predisposed to breaking down barriers and taking risks, even though these may seem to be attenuated in the face of what is glimpsed as a future opportunity destined for those who have earned it.

This is the competent and competitive individual, who seeks to maximize his human capital in all fields, who does not seek only to project himself into the future and calculate gains and costs like the old economic man, but who seeks above all to work on himself with the intention of continually transforming, improving, and becoming ever more effective. What distinguishes this subject is the very process of improvement that he performs on himself, leading him to ceaselessly improve his results and his performances. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 333. Authors' emphasis)

Being one's own company and developing one's human capital in view of the competition becomes the great obsession that guides the new subjectivity. There are many ways to meet the objective of self-training, which can be identified by at least two distinct strategies: the first refers to the offer of a range of training based on personal choices; the second is linked to the establishment of goals and the measurement of results by the company. The first refers to the use of techniques along the lines of coaching, neurolinguistics programming, transactional analysis, or procedures linked to "schools" or "gurus". These are methods in training format that think the government of self and the

government of others, "as thought in classical Greek ethics: he who is unable to govern himself is unable to govern others" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 339). Hence the commitment to increase self-mastery, to overcome stress, relationships with customers or employees, bosses or subordinates. The motto of this entrepreneurial person is, according to Dardot and Laval: "do whatever it takes to get what you really want. As long as you know what you want" (2016, p. 340-341).

The backdrop to the task of becoming an expert, an employer of oneself, an inventor and entrepreneur of oneself lies in the belief that all the resources necessary to do so are in the individual's possession, as long as he or she is creative. It is proper to neoliberal rationality to enjoin the self to act upon itself as a way to strengthen itself for survival in the world of competition. The techniques employed have a psychological background associated with formulas and testimonials of success to produce a psychological effect of self-esteem. Communication is another field of action of such methods, because the control of elementary requirements in this area makes it possible to use the right word to obtain the desired goal, as occurs, in many cases, in the sale of a particular product. It is a kind of brain reprogramming, based on the activation of motivations and the reinforcement of self-esteem that allows the planning and projection of clear objectives, a kind of simplification of goals, ranging from the field of relationships to, and especially, the professional and financial field. The assumption of this rationality is to transform the individual, through the incorporation of the principle of self-control in view of being able to influence others, starting very early with the child, turning him into "entrepreneur of his knowledge" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 336).

Training and coaching techniques are not, however, enough to ensure the desired performance. "The instauration of auditing, surveillance and evaluation techniques aims to increase this demand for self-control and good individual performance [...] 'evaluation' has become the first means of guiding conduct by stimulating individual 'good performance'" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 350-351. Authors' emphasis). Performance evaluation is a technique used initially in the private sector, but which has been improved through the establishment of goals, the analysis of daily performance, and the overcoming of one's own limits. This practice is increasingly applied to the public sector, even when the criterion of measurability is weak. This is yet another element that reinforces how this process is not natural, but a result of the "manufacturing" of the responsible man, of the subject that becomes measurable by his participation as a workforce, also relativizing academic training itself. "The technique of oneself is a technique of good performance in a competitive field. It aims not only at adaptation and integration; it aims at the intensification of performance." (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 352-353).

In the context of these transformations, new concepts are produced in the world of work that gain centrality: freedom, autonomy, and creativity. All of this constitutes a new work ethic with the conjunction between individual aspirations and the company's excellence objectives; between the personal project and the company's project. This is only possible if each individual becomes a small enterprise which presupposes, according to Dardot and Laval, conceiving it "as an entity composed of small enterprises of oneself" (2016, p. 334).

For the authors, "the enterprise of oneself is a 'psychological and social, even spiritual entity,' active in all domains and present in all relationships," making it possible to replace the "wage contract with a contractual relationship between 'enterprises of oneself'" (2016, p. 335. Authors' emphasis). Personal responsibility, competence, and ambition are prime attitudes and constitute an amalgam of this entrepreneurial mindset.

As Ball (2014, p. 64) observes, the changes brought about by neoliberalism are structural, but also subjective. Thus, says Ball

neoliberalism involves the transformation of social relations into calculability and exchange, that is, into market form, and thus the commodification of educational practice—for example, in student value economies, through performance pay, performance management, and the flexibilization and substitution of labor. Neoliberal technologies work in knots to produce a "docile and productive" faculty and student body, and responsible and enterprising teachers and students

The business model, according to Dardot and Laval, tends to be the main institution distributor of rules, categories and prohibitions, besides having legitimacy to establish rules and social identities (2016, p. 361). On the other hand, the weakening of "work collectives" reinforces isolation and leaves the individual extremely weakened and vulnerable (2016, p. 363). Thus, their choices are no longer a possibility, since a single path is presented. The way of acting recognized and presented as a model to be followed reinforces a false idea of governance, minimizes risks and limits subjectivity to the ideal of "undertaking of oneself". Consciously or unconsciously, the individual assimilates and accepts these responsibilities that are imputed to him.

Professional risk, now normal, puts the individual in a situation of constant vulnerability, which management manuals interpret positively as a state of exaltation and enrichment ('a trial that makes us grow'). When the entrepreneurial subject links his narcissism to the success of himself combined with that of the company, in a climate of competitive warfare, the slightest 'setback of fate' can have extremely violent effects. The neoliberal management of the company, internalizing market coercion, introduces the uncertainty and brutality of competition and makes subjects assume them as a personal failure, a shame, a devaluation. (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 363)

The neoliberal rationality built upon an apparent freedom of choice projects all the responsibility on the subject itself, who can either succeed or fail (SENNETT, 2005). But is it the individual the real prize or is it the company that aims to continuously increase productivity and profits? Is this new rationality, supported by the natural character of market reciprocity, the capitalist consecration where everyone wins? "If the individual must be open, 'synchronous,' 'positive,' 'empathetic,' 'cooperative,' it is not for his happiness, but above all and first of all to obtain from the 'collaborator' the performance that is expected of him" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 343-344. Authors' emphasis). This individualistic ethic looks like an "opportunity to throw all the costs on the back of the subject, by risk transfer mechanisms that have nothing 'natural' about them" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 350. Authors' emphasis).

The pseudo-freedom of choice implies, in any case, the deepening of a way of life guided by a logic of no return. Playing the game requires, in this context, developing one of the main qualities expected of the neoliberal individual: 'mobility', associated with detachment and the indifference that results from it. In turn, this specific type of detachment erodes the social bonds of generosity, fidelity, loyalty, solidarity, and of everything that is part of social and symbolic reciprocity in everyday work (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 365). From these new work relationships, an individualistic ethic results that weakens collectivity and erodes relationships and one's own personality, that is, destroys character (SENNETT, 2005, p. 13-76).

Taking all the risks on one's own is the price of the choice to produce oneself in all fields, from the body, to the psychological predispositions, to the planning of the dreamed financial stability. Everything seems to depend on the ability to plan and strategize with the self as the main resource. This is how neoliberal rationality acts "ordering the means to govern him so that he really conducts himself as an entity in competition and that, therefore, he must maximize his results, exposing himself to risks and taking full responsibility for any failures" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 328). After all, the authors continue, "it is a matter of making the general standard of effectiveness that applies to the company be replaced, at the individual level, by a use of subjectivity aimed at improving the individual's performance" (2016, p. 343).

The new subject, guided by a rationality of performance, experiences some dilemmas, even if these are attenuated in the name of freedom of choice and personal autonomy. He must give himself wholly to his work and bow to the demands placed upon him. Freedom becomes an obligation to perform, since the neoliberal management of the self consists in "manufacturing for oneself a productive self, which always demands more of itself and whose self-esteem grows, paradoxically, with the dissatisfaction one feels for past performances" (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 345). It is the ultimate belief that the source of effectiveness lies in the individual and no longer in an external authority. Hence the need for intrapsychic work in search of deep motivations, and in this way, "economic and financial coercion is transformed into 'self-coercion' and 'self-blaming,' since we are solely responsible for what happens to us." (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 245. Authors' emphasis).

There are pathological elements that complete the clinical picture of this subject obsessed by his own performance, by success, by achievement. The impact of possible failures is proportional to the emotional, psychological investment, of time and even of lost bonds. If success comes, the narcissistic effect manifests itself; the setback, however, does not fail to produce its effects with proportional intensity as well (HAN, 2017a; 2017b). Stress, harassment, and other symptoms produce mental pathologies and are imbricated with work intensification, tense flows, and the perverse consequences of reduced working conditions on productivity demands (DARDOT; LAVAL, 2016, p. 362). This makes the neo-subject an individual with a double physiognomy: "the triumphant face of unashamed success and the depressed face of failure in the face of uncontrollable processes," thus condemned to a double game: "master of admirable performances and object of disposable *jouissance*" (DARDOT;

LAVAL, 2016, p. 374). Performance rationality presupposes a self-programmed individual whose end is good performance, competition, and the calculation of personal interest. Hence the growing offers of situations that submit this individual to the logic of the market, weaving competitive subjectivity.

What we observe is a growing tendency to deepen this instrumental rationality. Neoliberal rationality tends to take over individuals who consider themselves subjects of themselves and the consequences are already noticeable and translated into increased anxiety, depression, hyperactivity, borderline personality disorders, Burnout syndrome, among others, which are symptoms on the rise in the 21st century, which leads Byung-Chul Han to state that it will be a century with neuronal problems, more than bacteriological or viral (2017b, p. 7). In the works: *Society of Transparency* (2017a) and *Society of Tiredness* (2017b), Han analyzes trends in today's society and concludes that they produce voids of meaning in life. Thus, sociological and epistemological imagination is needed to identify, qualitatively diagnose what is underway, as well as build alternatives sustained in other rationalities beyond neoliberal rationality. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen initiatives supported by democratic perspectives, collectivity, and the politics of the common (DARDOT and LAVAL, 2017). Education has, in this sense, an important role in human formation and in preparing people to live in society. This theme will be deepened in the sequel.

Beyond Performance Rationality: The Critical Role of the University in the Formation of a Democratic Culture

The University as a socio-educational institution is not exempt from the consequences of this new neoliberal rationality. In addition to receiving individuals who have internalized some of the characteristics of performance rationality, the institutions themselves often help to reinforce meritocratic discourses, strengthening neo-business subjectivities. To understand how the intertwining between social dynamics and the University happens, it is necessary to problematize educational issues more deeply. Thinking about the role of the University in a perspective of resistance to the model of performance rationality requires understanding it beyond an instrumental conception, that is, as an instrument to model something in someone.

The problem, as Biesta (2013) points out, is that, for today, it is necessary to understand education and teaching beyond controlling and norming individuals. Rather, it is necessary to reflect on the responsibility for the "coming into the world" of singular beings, unique, and also aware of their responsibility for the world, a world of plurality and difference. By posing the challenge to Higher Education institutions beyond the idea of instrumental education, the task of rethinking the educational processes within a possible conception is assumed. As Biesta states, "we should not approach education from the point of view of an educator trying to produce or liberate something. Instead, I contend that we should focus on the ways in which each individual's new beginning can become 'presence'" (2013, p. 26. Author's emphasis).

For Biesta, an educational discourse based on the concept of learning is growing and entering educational institutions, both in basic and higher education. It is necessary to be careful because, in this change, there is a reductionism of the language of education to the detriment of the language of learning, identified with the market's logic of satisfying the customer. The focus of reflection around learning proposes new theories based on easy learning and student emancipation, in the sense of placing the student as the center and the teacher as a supporting actor. Moreover, it ends up stimulating a self-taught individualism by proposing lifelong learning¹ and the erosion of the welfare state, compromising to a great extent collective social rights.

As an alternative to the language of learning, Biesta proposes that the language of education should be taken up again, based mainly on three points: The first concerns trust, because education is about taking risks. The learner has to be willing. One cannot predict the results of learning. Education can go down unexpected paths and trust without a specific foundation. The second point deals with transcendental violence, in which education is seen from the point of view of learning processes, albeit from a perspective of something that can be learned from external sources. The author proposes that learning be understood as response, as an attempt to reorganize and reintegrate, but not to dominate, internalize, and acquire. Education concerns the individuality, the subjectivity of students as unique beings and not simply repeaters of what is already given. "Learning as acquisition consists in getting more and more, learning as response consists in showing who you are and where you stand." Therefore, one cannot view education as simply pleasant and easy learning, in which the learner is always happy. Education involves a transcendental violence (BIESTA, 2013, p. 47). The third and final point involves the educator's responsibility for the subjectivity of the student. If education embraces difficult questions and that is why it becomes possible, the educator has an important role in taking responsibility for something that is not known and cannot be known in advance. It is not a role of knowing the outcome of educational actions by knowing the result of educational efforts and interventions. Education is not a process of insertion and adaptation, or even of production of a certain social order, but refers to the formation of unique, singular beings. The educator is an architect challenged with two roles: the creation and the constant undoing of this creation in a space of otherness and difference. The educator is responsible for the constant reflection of what is lived, keeping in mind the idea of the universal, thinking about the general context, the knowledge about what it is to be human and the complexity of relationships in a globalization context, where subjects are at the mercy of a subjectivity conditioned to consumer subjects (BIESTA, 2013).

¹ The concept of life long learning pursues neoliberal subjects as a constant updating similar to electronic devices. Either the subject is always in training (updating), or his system stops working. In the past, lifelong learning was seen as a personal asset and as an inherent aspect of democratic life. Today lifelong learning is understood in terms of human capital formation and as an investment for economic development (BIESTA, 2006, p. 169).

Biesta also proposes that it is necessary to understand the conception of human being as radically open. Becoming subject in the relationship with the other, it is necessary that education helps to think conditions for human action. It is from these visions and their relations with education that one can think of alternative societies and resistances to the rationality of performance. One can, therefore, "discard the illusion that the alternative subject could be found in one way or another as 'already there' [...] The question then comes down to how to articulate subjectivation to resistance to power." (DARDOT, LAVAL, 2016, p. 397-399. Authors' emphasis).

Educational Possibilities From a Democratic Perspective

The impact of the neoliberal rationality of performance directly affects global educational trends today, which strongly affect higher education, according to Marcon (2015, p. 264-286), Ball (2014), Santos (2004), Biagini and Peychaux (2014), Laval (2004), among others. Documents and agreements from transnational organizations establish curricular guidelines and political-educational orientations for different nations, based mainly on the development of skills and competencies for the neoliberal model of society. Allied to this teaching model, standardized tests of student performance are presented with the purpose of ensuring the quality of education, but they often cause a plastering of the teaching process and are focused on an exclusively market-oriented character².

It is important to note, as Biesta (2012, p. 810) states, that standardized tests are also used at the national level to provide information about the relative performance of schools. "They have a complicated logic, combining elements of accountability and choice with a social justice argument that everyone should have access to education of equal quality. Test data are used to identify so-called "failing schools" and, in some cases, "failing teachers" in schools. This reduces the educator's action, as he or she ends up yielding to the pressure of the tests and submitting to the teaching process based on the results, otherwise his or her work and, consequently, his or her school "lack quality.

This trend creates problems in the school space and in the very understanding of what education is, as well as of the educational institutions. With the strengthening and dissemination of neoliberal ethical values, all social spheres submit themselves to a mercadological conduct, including the University, which, in part, operates in the formation of the business subject, the rationality of performance, competition, and self-coercion and self-blame. Because it is disseminated in all social spaces, this new rationality gains space in the educational field, which progressively expands to all levels and modalities, transforming the act of educating into an instrument for the formation of neoliberal subjectivity. Education

² Perhaps the most prominent manifestation of this phenomenon can be found in international comparative studies such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Mathematics and Science Studies (PIRLS), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). (BIESTA, 2012, p. 810).

starts to be thought of within an exclusive logic of instrumental learning. The concern with how the student learns and what he should learn tends to instrumentalize education for the construction of a neoliberal subjectivity, of adapted, flexible and motivated subjects (BIESTA, 2013).

These general issues and the paths that education has taken, especially in recent decades, need a deeper look if we want to formulate criticism and propose alternatives to the neoliberal education model based on a rationality that interferes with the very experience of human beings in the world. "There are many discussions about educational processes and how to improve them, but very few about what these processes are supposed to cause" (BIESTA, 2012, p. 814).

The constitution of a critical subject can contribute to overcome an essentialist and naturalized conception of inequality, because, according to the author, one cannot know the nature/essence of the human being, much less educate from a perspective of molding the subject to something. The University, as Santos (2005) rightly observes, tends to focus on economic development, market desire, or customer satisfaction, and the deliberations about education itself, that is, an emancipating education, are lost. For Biesta (2012, p. 816),

there are even emancipatory possibilities in the new language of learning, in that it can empower individuals to take control of their own educational agendas. But there are also several problems connected with this new language - and one should not underestimate the ways in which language structures possible ways of thinking, doing, and reasoning to the detriment of other ways of thinking, doing, and reasoning.

When thinking about education, it is necessary to keep in mind that it constitutes an open space for the construction of opportunities. For an emancipating experience in the world, it is important that children are expected and that educational proposals are constituted in dialogue with the subjects. It is necessary to overcome the idea that education should serve an assumed formation for a certain type of society. The educators, subjects inserted in the educational practices at different levels, from kindergarten to higher education, have a primordial function to question and constantly learn, not being submissive to the lifelong learning in the sense of economic development. It is necessary to create conditions for students to free themselves from an educational and social system that rationally programs subjectivities and behaviors.

Focusing on the coming of new beginnings and new initiators into the world does not mean that educators should simply stand aside and let things happen-which is why the language of learning is not the language of education. At the same time, however, their commitment should not try to produce a particular kind of subjectivity, should not try to generate a particular kind of human being according to a particular definition of what it means to be human. The educator's responsibility is a responsibility for what will happen, without knowledge of what will happen. (BIESTA, 2013, p. 192).

The development of critical thinking, of the capacity of argumentation and perception of the Self as human, vulnerable and social, is presupposed to build resistance to the advance of neoliberal policies in the educational field and in the forms of subjectivation-subjectification of the subject-company today. Understanding political processes and decisions is important for the "development of political forms of being and doing (subjectivation), just as a strong focus on socialization in a particular order of citizenship can actually lead to resistance, which itself can be seen as a sign of subjectivation" (BIESTA, 2012, p. 821).

When we fail to reflect on these the political aspects of education and are unclear about the visions about the goals and their ends, we run the risk, as Biesta (2012, p. 823) points out, of statistics and rankings making these decisions for us. "We need, therefore, to keep the question of purpose - the question of what constitutes a good education - central in our educational discussions and broader endeavors."

Educational institutions at all levels need to place themselves in the position of agent, for they are responsible both for those who are beginners and for professional training. In this sense, the work of teaching, which is not just any work insofar as it involves helping to understand ongoing phenomena and also projecting new perspectives. Every teaching action interferes in the future, therefore, it is political. Hence the challenge of a critical training of social agents, regardless of age, developing responsibility for their actions and for the actions they will produce in relation to others. This implies rethinking the forms of neoliberal subjectivation in such a way that social practices are no longer based "in a notion of rationality or autonomy, but linked to the idea of a type of singularity that comes to light in the responsible capacity to respond to otherness and difference" (BIESTA, 2012, p. 820).

The challenge is to think about an education capable of overcoming common sense in the sense of naivety and fragmentation and, on the other hand, to put on the agenda the reflections on educational issues, both in terms of quality, and those that have a nostalgic basis that presupposes a time when education was perfect and society was better. "The task before us today is not to not reproduce the past, but rather to ask how we should respond educationally to the questions and challenges that confront us today" (BIESTA, 2013, p. 132). For Biesta (2013), the fact that we live in a community of rationales, one cannot deny or forget that as educators, this is one of the main reasons why schools exist. Our task as educators is to ensure that opportunities exist within the different educational institutions to make it possible for students to be creative and capable subjects to counteract the rationality of performance. In this sense, it is crucial to think about possibilities of resistance, starting in educational institutions because, as Dardot and Laval (2017) say, "this norm of competition is not spontaneously born in each of us as a natural product of the brain: it is not biological, it is the effect of a deliberate policy."

A perspective that presents itself as fruitful for overcoming the competitive logic is based on a conception of the democratic person. In this sense, Dewey's reflections help to think about the democratic subject that is effectively constituted from education and democratic practice.

For Biesta (2013, p. 173), education and democracy in Dewey are understood as interconnected as a result of social interactions and consciously shared interests. "The idea of the subject as a shaper of the conditions that shape subjectivity is central to Dewey's understanding of the democratic person presented."

Biesta (2013) proposes some questions that schools and educational institutions can reflect on with a view to democratic education. It is in action that we are subjects, since there is another involved in a relationship of exchange. One does not learn to be a subject, but one learns from being and having been a subject. This implies thinking not so much about how educational institutions can teach students to be democratic citizens, but about how many opportunities for democratic experiences exist in the school context and how students can initiate action in a world of plurality and difference. This requires that educational institutions at all levels are not plastered with and reproducing content required by curricula designed by market pressures. The challenge, according to Biesta, is to understand that schools

show no interest in what students think or feel, where the curriculum is only seen as subjects that need to be inserted into students' minds and bodies, and where the issue of the impact of one person's beginnings on the opportunities for others to begin is never taken into account, are clearly places where it is extremely difficult to act and be a democratic subject. (BIESTA, 2013, p. 184. Author's emphasis).

This responsibility cannot be seen as exclusive to school institutions. Society in general has a share of commitment in the constitution of a democratic citizen. Biesta asks himself how much action is possible in society. It is not possible to think of an education for democracy constituted only by the subjects, when not all subjects are allowed to act, or only some groups are allowed to act. Moreover, it is important to question whether all citizens want to participate in republican discussions about education and other social policies. Thus, as Biesta says, "we cannot simply blame education for the failure of democracy. The only way to improve the democratic quality of society is to make society more democratic, that is, to provide more opportunities for action" (BIESTA, 2013, p. 186).

There are, therefore, two important considerations regarding the interests of educators and those responsible for education: first, that education alone cannot save democracy - but they can enable spaces for action, where different subjects have the possibility to experience participation as subjects; second, that society itself is also responsible for democratic education, because "to the extent that action and subjectivity are possible in schools and in society, schools can perform the more modest and more realistic task of helping children and students learn and reflect on the fragile conditions for all people to act, for all people to be a subject" (BIESTA, 2013, p. 190).

Within a critical-dialectical perspective, education has to be thought of in a double possibility: to reinforce the discourses based on neoliberal assumptions that individualize success or failure in educational institutions or, to deepen the potentialities of the development of critical and emancipatory reflections. The neoliberal assumption of the market, based on competition and competition, cannot be extended to educational institutions. In the scope of educational institutions, according to the precepts established by the 1988 Constitution (BRASIL, 1988), the function is to guarantee "the full development of the person, his/her preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his/her qualification for work". Here there is an understanding of education that, despite being criticized, points to different horizons from those advocated by neoliberals.

Final Considerations

In the text, we problematize the model of subjectivation that has been gaining space in contemporary society and that results in a type of performance rationality that advances in an inner control of each subject, reducing the very human condition. Through a series of mechanisms of subjection, a false idea of freedom and subjective self-control is increasingly growing, but it essentially serves the interests of the economic market. It is clear that the subjectivity of performance acts directly from the perspective of productivity and the strengthening of consumption.

The neo-subjects, as Dardot and Laval (2016) call them, live as if all spheres of life depend solely on their performance, and that automatically their failures are assumed as exclusively individual responsibilities. This results in a deeply distressed and anxious human being who finds it difficult to think of alternative ways of living in society beyond competitiveness. It is not surprising that mental illnesses and medicalization are on the rise today as a result.

It is in the context of this diagnosis that education gains new meanings and is challenged to contribute to a critical reflection on the model of the subject as a company of itself and, at the same time, to help think about the formation of democratic and collaborative subjects. The tendencies of the competitive model are evident and its consequences are relatively predictable. In the face of this competitive logic, it is essential to think about new forms of sociability. Education for democratic life opens up a fruitful set of possibilities and educational institutions can contribute to this training at different levels. Early childhood education has its peculiarities, as does elementary and high school education. Higher education is challenged to prepare people who are professionally qualified, but also capable of living socially. Graduate education is challenged to contribute with research on the most diverse themes and problems in order to overcome divisions and conflicts among humans, as well as to help overcome human suffering.

Hence the need to deepen the criticism of the subjectivity model that neoliberalism projects, as well as to establish counterpoints to other perspectives of social life, of production of survival, of new forms of sociability. The great challenge lies in how to overcome the vision that part of the educators and managers have assumed in relation to the discourse in defense of a business model of education. As Laval (2004) rightly points out, education has to form individuals capable of living in society. The logic of competition and competition tends to permanently confront people in the struggle for better positions and rankings. As long as this logic penetrates subjectivities, the picture becomes very complex. In this competitive logic, there is no room for everyone.

Education for a democratic and citizen life is based on other assumptions that are denied by the neoliberal ideology. Instrumental education presupposes the transgression of the processes of constitution of a subject that lives collectively. Based on the arguments presented, we reinforce the thesis that it is possible to educate for social coexistence, which is always tense and permeated by conflicts. Educating for democracy implies training for the resolution of these conflicts and tensions. This preparation is only possible through education in its multiple expressions and forms. These tasks are incumbent on all educational institutions, but the University has a fundamental role as a trainer of ideas through the qualification of professionals at different levels, from undergraduate, to specialists, masters, and doctors.

Higher education is challenged to broaden its horizons of intervention, beyond the logic of competition, and beyond the logic of an instrumental education. As Santos (2005; 2010, p. 187-233) and Nussbaum (2010) well observe, the humanities have a fundamental role in the critical human, citizen, and democratic formation in all areas of knowledge. Before any specific professional training we are beings that need to learn to live together, as Dewey (1079) observes.

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