

School without party, curriculum ideologies and Didaktik: deciphering discourses

Escola sem Partido, ideologias curriculares e didática: decifrando discursos

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Abstract: since the Brazilian educational system was erected, several different social groups and movements tried to influence the direction of the national curriculum and teachers' practices. This article aims to explore the main ideas of the school without party, a movement in Brazil that upholds the idea of public schools free of ideological influence. The supporters of this movement allege school teachers, especially the ones from the fields of social sciences and humanities, take advantage of the captive audience of learners to indoctrinate them with Marxist, feminist and other supposedly left-wing ideologies. Drawing from Schiro's (2013) discussions on curriculum ideologies and from the German and Nordic Didaktik tradition, I examine school without party's website, the bill 867/2015 that implements their programme and an article published by one of the founders of the movement in a local newspaper during the discussion of the Common National Curriculum Frameworks (BNCC). With this article, I plan to point out the importance of examining the relationship between schooling and social movements through analysis of changes proposed in school's curricula by the school without party.

Keywords: School without party. Social movements. Didaktik tradition. Curriculum ideologies. Education in Brazil.

Resumo: desde que o Sistema educacional brasileiro foi construído, diversos grupos e movimentos sociais tentaram influenciar a direção do currículo nacional e das práticas dos professores. Esse artigo busca explorar as principais ideias do scola sem partido, um movimento brasileiro que apoia a ideia de escolas públicas livres de influência ideológica. Os apoiadores desse movimento alegam que professores, especialmente das disciplinas de ciências sociais e humanidades, aproveitam-se da audiência cativa dos estudantes para doutriná-los com ideologias marxistas, feministas e outras supostamente esquerdistas. Baseando-se na discussão de Schiro (2013) sobre ideologias curriculares e na tradição alemã e nórdica da Didaktik, eu examino o website do Escola sem partido, o projeto de lei 867/2015 que implementa o programa e um artigo publicado por um dos fundadores do movimento em um jornal local durante a discussão sobre a Base Nacional Comum Curricular (BNCC). Com esse artigo, eu planejo apontar para a importância de examinar a relação entre escolarização e movimentos sociais com base na análise das mudanças propostas no currículo escolar pelo Escola sem partido.

Palavras-chave: Escola sem partido. Movimentos sociais. Didaktik. Ideologias curriculares. Educação no Brasil.

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Introduction

Nowadays, one of the most active social movement that tries to influence education in Brazil is the *escola sem partido* (school without party). This group upholds the idea of public schools free of influence of ideologies and they allege that school teachers, especially the ones from the fields of social sciences and humanities, take advantage of the captive audience of learners to indoctrinate them with Marxist, feminist and other supposedly left-wing ideologies. The objective of this article is to analyse the ideas that motivate this social movement and the curriculum ideologies they support and fight against, according to the framework designed by Schiro (2013). I also briefly discuss their proposals in the light of the Didaktik tradition from German-speaking and Nordic countries.

To achieve these objectives, I examine information provided in their website and publication of their ideas in newspaper, framing within the current scholarly debate. With this brief article, my goal is to indicate the importance of examining the relationships between social movements and both the curriculum ideologies and the Didaktik tradition, using the school without party as a case study. In this paper, I start by discussing the main ideas of the school without party by referring to the discussion of social movements and the left/right political dichotomy. Then I move to examine the relations between their ideas and the curriculum ideologies and the Didaktik tradition. I suggest their main fight is against the social reconstructionist ideology, but they also oppose to main features of the Didaktik tradition namely freedom of teaching and Bildung, because they support silencing teachers and constrain schools to discuss controversial subjects. In the conclusion I discuss some possible consequences of the implementation of their project.

Development

Along the history of education in Brazil, many different organisations of civil society and social moments have tried to push educational policies towards their interests. During the debates around the first draft of the Constitution during the period of 1986-1988, for example, the Nation Forum in Defence of Public Education (FNDEP, in the Portuguese acronym), was an important movement against privatisation of basic education and market-oriented forces. It was a union of distinct entities that advocated for a public educational system free of charge and universal, and it helped development and execution of laws concerning public schooling (LEHER & VITTORIA, 2015). Therefore, since the beginning of the democratic period in Brazil in 1985, education has been an arena for public debate and struggle between different social movements.

However, the category of social movement is usually related to emancipatory or left-wing conceptions and ideologies, from classic movements as trade unions to more contemporary such as occupy, environmental organisations or women, black and LGBT associations. In the field of education English and Mayo (2012) argue that movements such as the Occupy or the Arab Spring are examples where informal education takes place.

They “have been perceived to constitute an alternative to the ‘defeated left’ as a result of the collapse of the Berlin Wall” (ENGLISH & MAYO, 2012, p. 111), always referring to left-wing movements. Drawing from Gramsci’s concept of hegemony, the authors claim social movements pressure the state to attend their revindications, creating policies directed to specific social groups or agendas who are usually neglected.

On the other hand, according to Souza (2009), the rise of Nazism in the 1920s or the revolution that deposed the shah of Iran to install a theocratic regime in Iran were all supported by social movements. Gohn (2008) also understands that the concept encompasses conservative and reactionary movements because it is related to collective social action. Taking the Gramscian concept of hegemony, the pressure can happen from both sides, as it happened in Brazil in 2011. In that occasion, organised religious groups pressured parliamentarians and the media against an educative material against homophobia to be distributed to schools. Gohn provides a broad enough definition for social movement that includes conservative groups: according to her, a social movement must have a system of values or ideology, a sense or common identity, norms for action and organisational structures to achieve the goals of the movement (GOHN, 2008).

According to this perspective, the school without party can be considered a social movement. They perform social actions, have common identity and clear goals, although their ideology needs more examination. According to their website, the group was created by students and parents worried with the degree of political-ideological contamination of Brazilian school system, from elementary school to higher education (<<http://www.escolasempartido.org/quem-somos>>. Access on August 13th, 2018). The group has three general and four specific goals, as described in the “who we are” section. They fight for

- Political and ideological decontamination and de-monopolisation of schools
- Respect to intellectual and moral integrity of students
- Respect of the parents’ right of giving their children moral education in accordance to their own beliefs

In the Frequently Asked Questions, meanwhile, they argue that there would be nothing wrong in awakening critical consciousness with students if that meant something differently than simply “thump left-wing ideas in students’ heads”.

As it is known, critical vision of students is always directed to the same targets: western civilisation, Christianity, Christian values, catholic church, the bourgeoisie, the traditional family, the private property, capitalism, free-market, agrobusiness, military regime, the United States etc. On the counterpart, nothing or almost nothing is said to students about the more than 100 million corpses produced by communism [...]. (<<http://www.escolasempartido.org/faq>>. Access on: August 13th, 2018.)

From the quote above, one can apply the left-right distinction and relate the movement with the right-wing spectrum. According to Bobbio (2009), maintain tradition is the preeminent function of right, while the left is guided by the concept of emancipation: the right is led by safeguarding traditions while the left looks for liberation and end of

privileges. According to the same author, the main feature of the far-right is their anti-Enlightenment position: they are anti-democratic because they do not want to simply defend their positions but mainly to prevent even the public debate. Although it is not possible to state that school without party is an extreme-right movement, some features of this immoderation is seen below.

The bills that have been proposed in municipal and state levels in Brazil in the name of the group are, with some minor changes, copy and paste from the bill proposed in their website. The third article this document prohibits political and ideological indoctrination as well as teaching of content or activities that might conflict with religious or moral convictions of parents or tutors of students (PL 867/2015). The unreasonable usage of the word 'might' excludes almost any content or activities from the classroom, since almost any teaching can be against the diversity of parents' convictions.

Moreover, as there is no definition of what indoctrination is, Penna (2016) indicates you can find a text in their website that states that you might be victim of ideological indoctrination when your teacher, for instance, frequently deviates from the matter of the subject to themes related to political or international news. In other words, discussing issues that are happening outside school is not part of teachers' tasks, he must only transfer knowledge without dialogue with the students' realities (PENNA, 2016).

Within the ongoing public discussion of the Common National Curriculum Frameworks (BNCC, in the acronym in Portuguese), the creator of the school without party movement published in a national newspaper their opinion on the draft of the document circulated by the Ministry of Education. In this article he suggests that, if this proposal from the Ministry is approved, Brazilian students that want to learn something about Ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia or Greece, Roman Empire, Renaissance or French Revolution must get by on their own: according to him, BNCC proposes that, in classroom, they must study about indigenous, African and afrobrasilian worlds, interpret black social movements and respect African cultures (NAGIB, 2016). In his opinion, this is an absurd.

The school without party does not explicitly take stand to any ideology. Otherwise, they claim for neutrality as they understand that left-wing ideologies invaded the school system and students and parents must fight against them. Therefore, it is not surprise they strongly oppose Paulo Freire's ideas and his role as patron of Brazilian Education. According to Freire, education is a political act: teacher must assume their non-neutrality as political and live coherently their option either as progressist, democratic, reactionary etc. (FREIRE, 1998). He claims that he cannot deny or hide his position from students and in the name of the respect with them, he must not cover his political options: his omission is the best way of disrespecting them. On the contrary, his role is to testimony the right to compare, choose, disrupt and stimulate the assumption of these rights from learners (FREIRE, 1997).

Freire is usually associated with the social reconstructionist ideology, as described by Schiro (2013). According to him, from this perspective, partiality is inherent in the process of education. From the questions teachers ask and the rules inside the classroom to the social interactions among pupils and the hidden curricula

[...] all have social biases embedded in them. Questions of what to teach, what to expect of students, where to teach, and how to teach all involve values decisions that make impartiality impossible. Social reconstructionists believe educators who consider themselves impartial and neutral transmitters of instruction to be ignorant of the nature of their endeavors (SCHIRO, 2013, p. 172).

Although not discussed by Schiro (2013), it is possible to track the historical roots of reconstructionism in Marxism and other critique traditions, such as the works of Gramsci on education as well as feminist theories. These are the main targets of the public attacks from school without party representatives, which makes evident that social reconstructionism is the ideology they most strongly fight against.

However, it is not as easy to identify which curriculum ideology or sociologic perspective they support¹. In the article referred above, Nagib mentions the Ancient Greece, Mesopotamia or Egypt as important periods of time/space that students might want to “learn something about”, which seems to refer to a rudimentary version of the scholar academic ideology. Macedo (2017) also discusses that the school without party defends curriculum as a set or list of contents to be taught in schools by analysing its critique of the draft of the BNCC. They complain the organisation of the document around learners’ rights is the wrong path for a document created by the Ministry of Education – if the purpose was to discuss rights, the debate should move from the Executive to the Congress (MACEDO, 2017). Therefore, the movement recommends limiting the BNCC to the discussion around curriculum, which again seems to coadunate to the scholar academic ideology.

Furthermore, Macedo (2017) indicates the support of the movement of a functionalist perspective of education, as Collins (1971) and Baker (2014) define it. In a text named “teacher is not educator” available on their website, the school without party separate instruction from education. While education allegedly should occur in the private space of the family, the public space of school is responsible for the learning of contents and for instruction. According to them, education is to promote feelings and habits that allow a person to adapt in the environment they will live, while instruction is to provide knowledges and skills that allow a person to earn a livelihood (Macedo, 2017, p. 515). School education, or simply instruction, according to them, shall be occupied only in adding knowledge and skills to the labour market.

If in which concerns curriculum the movement embraces only a strict vision of the scholar academic ideology, without considering the possibility of developing scientific minds that can inquiry and seek truth, regarding the German and Nordic tradition their conception is antagonistic. Hopmann (2007) observes that Didaktik tradition concerns with autonomy and freedom of teaching and learning, because it is the meeting and the relationship between people that dictate the outcomes of learning. According to him, Didaktik is about “how teaching can instigate learning” (HOPMANN, 2007, p. 113), not as

¹ Schiro (2013) claims that one of the objectives of his book is to “carefully examine the way educators use language based on their own frequently unspoken assumptions” (xix). Assuming this perspective, I try to trace which ideology school without party impliedly advocates for.

something that should be transferred from one side to the other, but as an activity that the students engage in.

For Wahlström & Sundberg (2018), Didaktik has provided for autonomy for teachers in Nordic countries for a long time. It offers “teachers the responsibility for deciding the content and methods of their subjects in the classroom as well as evaluation” (WAHLSTRÖM & SUNDBERG, 2018, p. 8). Bildung is another core concept for the Didaktik tradition and it usually refers to individual growth of the student and the student access to the world. Bildung can also mean “preparing students for lifelong learning beyond formal education, for the sake of transforming themselves as human beings, and to the extent possible, extend that transformation to what the person does (occupation) and society at large” (TAHIRSYLAJ, NIEBERT & DUSCHL, 2015, p. 266). Knowledge is seen, thus, as a “transformative tool of unfolding the learner’s individuality and sociability (HOPMANN, 2007, p. 115).

In the school without party perspective, teaching shall not seek for transformation or individual growth: instruction is a matter of contents. They also see students as passives or hostages of powerful mean teachers, so there is no space either for freedom of learning or even to consider pupils as individuals able to make choices, so they diverge with the Bildung conception. Moreover, the school without party restrain freedom of teaching because it constrains possibilities of tutors inside classrooms, creating functionalist and market-oriented relations based on clients and providers, not collaborative workers. In other words, their proposals do not fit any of the core ideas of the Didaktik tradition.

Conclusion

As it has been said by several scholars – not only those affiliated with social reconstructionist ideologies – neutrality in education is not only not possible as also undesirable. While supposedly advocating for a neutral school education, the school without party movement hides its own ideologies behind critiques against the reconstructionism in classroom. However, instead of simply arguing or defending their ideas, they act as censors who want to prevent teachers to deal with contemporary issues of oppressions and inequalities. Rather than perceiving the school as an institution that might promote a distinct conception of society from the families, they advocate for less space for public debates or controversies in schools, preventing children to access different points of view and enlarging their perspective.

Although many teachers might have left-wing and emancipatory positions, there is no evidence that pupils are deceived or misled by their tutors’ opinions. On the other hand, as suggested by Penna (2016, 2017), the movement defends gagging school teachers, and from school without party it turns to a school with a single party, where the families beliefs (which families?) overcome the public educational process. He argues that the school without party is a threat for the emancipatory education. The freedom and autonomy of teachers and learners, as supported by different traditions such as the Didaktik, is suppressed by private desires. The school without party is, indeed, a threat to

the freedom of teaching and learning and to diversity of subjects inside the educational system.

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