

Impact of Neoliberal Educational Policies on Equity and Teaching Practices. A Case Study in Two Secondary Schools.

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Research proposal and theoretical framework

Different international organizations (OECD, World Bank and UNESCO, among others) and strategies for the unification of educational objectives and policies (Lisbon Strategy and Horizon 2020 Project, Agenda 2030, for example) have been promoting a global educational agenda (GEA onwards) in recent decades that is oriented towards an educational transformation that seeks cultural homogenization, the reinforcement of the labor market and reforms based on a sustainable, efficient and quality investment (Rodríguez-Martínez, 2019).

As other works point out, these educational policy reforms that seek to transform the organization and management of schools are carried out by introducing the postulates of the economics of education and management into the educational system. business; so we could call it a “neoliberal pedagogy” (Díez, 2018).

This system is based on the values of merit, efficiency, effectiveness and competitiveness, which end up being specified in the support of various educational policies: freedom of choice of center, liberal and private management of schools, external evaluations and creation of rankings or classifications of centers. These measures support a context that invites competition between educational centers, since schools must make use of their autonomy in management to compete with each other for the results in external evaluations, thereby seeking the best positions in the rankings than with these are created and, in this way, ensure that families with better socioeconomic and cultural levels choose them for their sons and daughters.

Based on previous studies (Ball, 2003, 2013; Martín-Alonso et al., 2018; Saura, 2015), these policies end up configuring a new educational control model focused on efficiency and results that have been called performativity technology. This is, synthesizing, that both teachers and students should guide their efforts to get as close as possible to achieving the standards established by the educational administration.

At this point it is worth asking in what ways do teachers assume (or not) the guidelines of educational policies that specify the discourses of the GEA? What are the performativity technology devices developed by the GEA and how are they materialized in classrooms? To what extent is the technology of performativity established as a mode of governmentality of schools? To think about these questions, we propose as the focus of the study: to delve into the ways in which the discourses of the GEA take shape in the teaching practice of teachers and in the governance of educational centers.

Within this framework, and within a broader research project (New educational policies and their impact on equity: school management and teacher professional development, PGC2018-095238-B-I00) we intend to deepen in different educational contexts of several regions in Spain. Specifically, in this proposal we present the study carried out in two public high schools in Andalucía (Spain), where educational innovation projects have been promoted in recent years.

Methodology

The framework of global educational political transformations in which we are immersed points out educational innovation as an engine for the achievement of equity (OECD, 2015). With this in mind, the purpose of this case study is to delve into the ways in which the GEA discourses take shape in the teaching practice of teachers and in the government of educational centers.

To address these issues, the research is located in the framework of the case studies (Stake, 2010). Specifically, we have delved into the experience lived by teachers of two secondary schools in Andalucía. The main research procedure has been the hermeneutic conversation (Martín-Alonso, 2019). They were meetings in which we wanted to think together about their experience at school. That is, talk in an open way, without a rigid question-answer structure but, at the same time, staying attached to the research purpose and questioning (ourselves) about their meaning in their teaching practice.

In this sense, we investigate from Blanco, Molina and López's idea of "investigate with". That is, we have not treated teachers as sources of information, but as people with whom to investigate in order to think together and build meaning on the research questions and purposes.

The meetings took place with the directors and teaching staff of the secondary schools. Teachers were selected through purposive sampling. We invited to participate those who showed involvement in the innovation projects that were being carried out in each school. In total we interviewed 7 teachers, plus the directors of the schools. We realized between 1 and 3 interviews with each one.

All conversations were recorded and subsequently transcribed to facilitate their analysis, which was carried out following what Van Manen (2003) calls a "thematic analysis" (p.184) and "through examples" (p.187).

Results

In line with Ball's (1993, 2003, 2013) study, we observe how there is a "circularity of influences". That is, not only educational policies shape schools, but also, life in schools shapes educational policies. We must not forget that the ultimate purpose of educational policies (and also of curricular policies) is the experience of students and teachers at school, and that it is them who build the curricula and make sense of it in their daily experience (Martín-Alonso et al., 2019; 2021).

The analysis of the results points to management practices and external evaluations as two essential control technologies in the constitution of what we have called the neoliberal teaching subject. That is, teachers are impelled by these technologies to develop educational practices guided by the discourses of the GEA and, since the conditions that have forced them to develop these practices are not questioned, they end up living them as their own, as nascent from personal decisions. In this way, a neoliberal teaching subjectivity is formed that no longer needs to be directed by directive or disciplinary means and that obeys the mandates of neoliberal pedagogy.

Finally, we point out that the neoliberal teaching subject is immersed in a post-Fordist work system - in an Arendtian sense. That is, the educational objectives, what is expected of students, are the same for everyone. And as it has been studied (Connell, 1997; Martín-Alonso & Blanco, 2018; Torres, 2011), with a homogeneous curriculum, students whose context is closest to the hegemonic culture will have greater facilities to achieve school success. Therefore through a

higher qualification and further training, they will maintain a hierarchical status similar to the one they already enjoyed before entering school.

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