

The context of external evaluations in the state of Ceará from the perspective of SPAECE- ALFA

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Abstract:

Background: The educational public policies in Ceará focused on evaluations have instituted the Permanent Evaluation System for Basic Education in Ceará in literacy, the SPAECE-Alfa as a milestone in the development of literacy in the state. However, clashes and dilemmas revolve around these assessments, bringing up discussions about how their results are put into the school context. For this reason, this paper aims to discuss the meanings of external assessments and their implications for the consolidation of children's literacy. To this end, this work is theoretically based on the historical-social conception constructed by Vygotsky, with input from studies developed by Hofmann (2001) and Luckesi (2011a, 2011b) on learning assessment, as well as others that deal with the subject of educational assessment.

Methodology: The methodology employed is based on the perspective of a qualitative bibliographic study.

Results: The results obtained by this research make up the scope for a reflection on educational policies and possible increases for an evaluation based not only on results, but on meaningful learning..

Keywords: External evaluation, SPAECE-Alfa, Learning, Meanings.

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I. Introduction

External evaluations have become a guiding framework for public policies in the country, occupying a fundamental place in the elaboration of goals that permeate all educational spheres and serving as a parameter for the debate on improving teaching. In this way, large-scale assessments are not only a monitoring tool, but also an important decision-making tool in the quest for quality education.

From this perspective, the educational policies in force in the state of Ceará have directed external evaluations and their results in the search for this quality education, incorporating them and directing them to all of Ceará municipalities. As a result, the expansion and scope of this evaluation system has not only made it possible to diagnose the quality of public education, but its results have also served as a contribution to consolidating education throughout the state. As such, it has become an essential instrument for fostering public debate and promoting actions aimed at improving and implementing the democratization of education, guaranteeing everyone equal access to and permanence in school (CEARÁ, 2012).

However, the culture of these evaluations has served to control learning processes and the search for quantitative results has distorted their objectives and this has led many researchers in the field to discuss the direction and meaning that these evaluations have taken in the current situation. It is clear that assessment policies have taken directions that prioritize results more than the process itself. Although the results of the latest large-scale assessments in our state have shown satisfactory progress in terms of reading and writing skills in the initial grades of elementary school, it is clear from the data from the final grades of both primary and secondary school that there is a paradox between what is taught and what is actually learned.

This discontinuity and fragmentation of results are factors that urgently need to be analyzed and, consequently, reformulated. In order to do this, it is necessary for external evaluations to encompass all aspects of learning and become mediators rather than measurers of the teaching process. Based on these assumptions,

we ask ourselves: to what extent have these assessments and their results made a significant contribution to consolidating learning and improving the educational system in Ceará? With this in mind, this article aims to discuss the meanings of external assessments and their implications for children's learning. To this end, we will base this discussion on the historical-social perspective constructed by Vygotsky, with theoretical contributions from studies developed by Jussara Hofmann and Cipriano Luckesi on learning assessment, as well as others that deal with the subject of educational assessment, which we will discuss below, focusing on its main guidelines.

II. Theoretical assumptions: Evaluation as a process, not an end.

Assessment in the school context is one of the aspects that deserves to be highlighted because of the way it is being considered: a mere set of techniques aimed at obtaining objective information, detached from the learning process. By restricting it to student performance, it ignores both the contribution it could make to understanding that performance and the value it could acquire for pedagogical research (LUCKESI, 2011a). As a result, we can see that teaching practice is geared towards training to "solve tests", with a view to preparing for these assessments and, consequently, the search for results that prioritize numbers on proficiency scales.

Many authors, including Luckesi, have brought up discussions and debates about assessments in the educational context, denouncing the way in which they have gained independence from the teaching-learning relationship. It is necessary to understand that assessment is an act of investigating the quality of what constitutes its object of study and, for this very reason, it should support decisions about pedagogical acts from the perspective of the efficiency of the desired results (LUCKESI, 2011b).

However, what we see is that these assessments don't always take into account what has been taught, and are often focused only on descriptors that don't measure the child's learning. According to Luckesi (2011a), the assessment of school learning takes on its meaning to the extent that it is articulated with a pedagogical project and its consequent teaching project. For this reason, it cannot be studied, defined and outlined without a project to articulate it. For this author, this statement seems to be a contradiction in terms, as we might think that those working in teaching are interested in students learning, but this is not the case. According to the author, "[...] the achievement of desired results depends on clear objectives and investment in their pursuit. Planning, executing and evaluating are facets of the same act of building successful results" (LUCKESI, 2011a, p.119).

Corroborating these ideas, Libâneo (1994) states that these evaluations need to follow the student's teaching and learning process step by step and that their results should serve to verify progress, difficulties and reorient the work to make the necessary corrections. Thus, understanding that assessment should be part of the entire educational process means understanding it as a fundamental part of the process and serving as a support for the consolidation of teaching and learning.

On the other hand, we realize that over the years assessment has taken on contradictory meanings with regard to learning. In the current situation, there is a need to detach assessment from the search for results, thus recovering its political dimension. It is contradictory for a school that claims to be democratic to base its ideals on evaluation practices, and this becomes even more complex when we refer to literacy. On this issue, Hoffmann (2001) also states that evaluation is a broad action that encompasses the daily routine of pedagogical practice and whose energy makes planning, the pedagogical proposal and the relationship between all the elements of educational action pulsate.

In the state of Ceará, evaluations have undergone profound transformations since the creation of the Permanent System for the Evaluation of Basic Education in Ceará - SPAECE - in 1992, and have followed the purpose of fostering changes in search of quality education (CEARÁ, 2017, p. 8). With the implementation of the Literacy at the Right Age Program (PAIC) in 2007, the scope of the large-scale assessment system incorporated literacy assessment with the creation of SPAECE-Alfa (Permanent System for the Assessment of Basic Education in Ceará in Literacy), thus enabling the monitoring and implementation of a state literacy assessment policy. According to Lima (2012), monitoring the education system by analyzing external evaluations and monitoring their results has made a significant contribution to improving education in the state.

According to Lima (2012), SPAECE-Alfa prioritizes the literacy of children up to the age of seven. To this end, this evaluation system consists of an external, census evaluation, carried out at the end of the second year of primary education in public schools, thus making it possible to build a quality indicator of reading ability, as well as to subsidize managers in the formulation of incentive policies and the redistribution of financial resources to municipalities and schools (LIMA, 2012, p. 45).

From this point of view, the SPAECE-Alfa takes on an important dimension in terms of gathering elements that make it possible to read the real stage of development of the children's literacy process. This assessment offers fertile ground for reflection on actions aimed at improving the quality of education for students in public schools, with a focus on literacy. From this perspective, large-scale assessment aims to obtain general information, which is important for thinking about the quality of education, but it will only be a tool for this purpose if it is used coherently, adding new information to that already obtained by teachers and managers in the appropriate educational instances, in line with the local reality (CEARÁ, 2012).

Therefore, assessment needs to serve the democratization of teaching, changing its use from classification to diagnosis. According to Luckesi (2011a), assessment should be seen as an instrument for understanding the stage of learning the student is at, with a view to making sufficient and satisfactory decisions so that they can move forward in the learning process.

III. The meanings of external evaluation: clashes and dilemmas

The current practice of school evaluation has stipulated that the function of the act of evaluation is classification and not diagnosis. In this way, the act of evaluation does not serve as a pause to think about practice and return to it, but rather as a means of judging practice and making it visible in its classificatory function. According to Luckesi (2011a), when assessment takes on a classificatory function, it is an instrument of control, while diagnostic assessment is a time to advance in the development of action, growth towards autonomy. Although external evaluations have been configured as diagnostic, what we still see is that these evaluations are structured around the search for results on proficiency scales, often contradicting the very evaluation policy in force in the country.

In this sense, the large-scale evaluations proposed and disseminated by the evaluation policies of the state of Ceará have served not only to measure literacy, but also seem to serve as a pedagogical support for a reflective pedagogical practice for teachers, when they report on the effective contribution and significance of these evaluations for children's learning.

The ideals proposed by the PAIC's evaluation axis advocate that such evaluations can offer parameters that make it possible both to diagnose children's knowledge in order to (re)organize the educational practices developed and to evaluate educational results. To this end, the external evaluations proposed by SPAECE-Alfa assess children's learning and serve as a self-assessment of pedagogical work, as well as serving as a class diagnosis (CEARÁ, 2016). In this context, it is clear that external evaluation plays the role of a diagnostic tool and is at the service of a pedagogy concerned with social transformation, as Luckesi (2011a) argues.

The complexity of the assessment phenomenon is highlighted by Perrenoud (1999), according to whom there is no assessment without social relations and interpersonal communication, as it is a mechanism of the education system that converts cultural differences into school inequalities. The problem lies in the fact that school assessment should be a means and not an end in itself and should be intertwined with pedagogical praxis, and cannot take place in a conceptual vacuum. It should always be dimensioned by a theoretical model of society, of man, of education and, consequently, of teaching and learning, far from being understood as something isolated, but as an integration for the pursuit of results, not only quantitative, but also quality in education.

IV. The implications and re-significance of external evaluations in the school context and in children's learning

Learning assessment is a component of pedagogical practice and it is necessary to understand that the act of assessment is indispensable to the teaching-learning process. In this sense, it is worth emphasizing that assessment should be approached as a subsidiary resource for obtaining the desired results in planned pedagogical actions in the school environment. This is justified because, historically, the practice of school exams has taken the place of assessment, treating it as something separate from pedagogy and not as part of it, when, in fact, the assessment of learning together with planning and execution should make up the algorithm of the pedagogical act.

However, what we have seen today is a deconstruction of assessment, which revolves around results on proficiency scales. Based on this dimension, we can see an even greater complexity with regard to assessments, given that the culture of external assessments has imposed such broad spaces on teaching processes that educational practice is now directed by a pedagogy of the exam, as Luckesi (2011b) denounces.

For this author, teachers must give a new direction to the practice of school evaluation by directing or redirecting their pedagogical action, assuming a clear and explicit pedagogical position that can guide pedagogical practice, in planning, execution and evaluation (LUCKESI, 2011a).

Assessment must not focus on the products, but must place the process developed by the child in the foreground and analyze the products within the framework of this process, rather than comparing them to external standards (LERNER; PIZANI, 1995).

In this sense, it is important to emphasize that the evaluation instituted in the current context has become an instrument that supports decisions on pedagogical and administrative acts with a view to the efficiency of the desired results, but what concerns us is how this instrument is interpreted by the school and directed towards pedagogical practice and what this represents for learning. Children should not be seen as the object of assessment, but as its subject; their participation in the assessment process will help them to become aware of their own learning and will provide important elements for valuing all pedagogical action.

Lerner and Pizani argue that it is essential to re-contextualize assessment within pedagogical progress, turning it into an instrument for reflecting on the system of interactions involved in this process. If these evaluations and their results were really articulated in a pedagogical project, they would serve to define the appropriate guidelines for learning and would fulfill their formative role.

V. Conclusion

When we discussed assessment and its relationship with learning, especially the learning of children in the early grades of elementary school, we realized how much assessment still takes place in the search for results and often disfigures the teaching-learning process. Bearing in mind the concepts and conceptions that guide assessment practices, its results should enable paths towards meaningful learning and the student's own education.

Assessment cannot be practiced with such independence from the teaching-learning process. In order for assessment to become a significant subsidiary instrument of educational practice, it is important that both educational practice and assessment are geared towards the construction of significant learning outcomes, which will benefit the child's development (LUCKESI, 2011a). This will only be possible when the results are present in the teaching and learning process, and not just put on proficiency scales.

We therefore conclude that it is necessary to understand that assessment is not just about the teaching process, but that it is meaningful and part of the teaching-learning process. To this end, it requires a pedagogical approach and the consolidation of public policies that see it not just as indices derived from data, tests and measurements, but that its results favor paths to meaningful learning.

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