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## Education and Inclusion: equity and learning as capital strategies

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**ABSTRACT – Education and Inclusion: equity and learning as capital strategies.** In this article, international educational policy guidelines between 1990 and 2020 were discussed, and three generations of special education policies in Brazil were analyzed, relating education and inclusion with equity and learning strategies. Such strategies are related to educational diversification, curriculum flexibility, differentiation of trajectories, and skills and competencies that do not require school institutions and knowledge. There is a multifaceted perspective related to inclusion, combining segregated and integrationist services. The proposals under discussion lead to lower education levels and de-schooling processes, reinforcing the inequality mechanisms that constitute capital sociability.

**Keywords: Education. Inclusion. Equity. Learning. International Organizations.**

**RESUMO – Educação e Inclusão: equidade e aprendizagem como estratégias do capital.** Discutimos orientações internacionais de políticas educacionais entre 1990 e 2020 e analisamos três gerações de políticas de educação especial no Brasil, relacionando o eixo educação e inclusão e as estratégias equidade e aprendizagem. As estratégias têm relação com diversificação educacional, flexibilização curricular, diferenciação de trajetórias, habilidades e competências que prescindem das instituições escolares e do conhecimento. Identificamos uma perspectiva multifacetada relacionada à inclusão, combinando atendimentos segregados e integracionistas. As proposições em tela induzem ao rebaixamento formativo e processos de desescolarização, reforçando os mecanismos de desigualdade constitutivos da sociabilidade do capital.

**Palavras-chave: Educação. Inclusão. Equidade. Aprendizagem. Organismos Internacionais.**

## **Introduction to the Debate: international organizations and the education and inclusion axis**

International organizations have acted decisively, introducing guidelines for educational policies in peripheral countries aimed at outlining trends for the training of workers, expanding the production and consumption of technologies, and formulating consensus on political orientations in the economic and social areas.

In the 1990s, ideologies such as *globalization*, *knowledge society*, and the development of neoliberal policies in indebted peripheral countries contributed to establishing a set of reforms outlined for the education area. According to Leher (1999, p. 25), the “[...] connection between knowledge and order constitutes the ‘solid core’ of the World Bank educational proposals in the 1990s”. According to the author, if on the one hand, order is related to issues of security and control of political insurgencies, on the other hand, knowledge is not referred to in relation to its appropriation by subjects to promote human development. It is a renewed perspective of the theory of human capital, in which the market determines the knowledge that is useful for its development and that must be mobilized for the production process. Therefore, education becomes central to the discourse of international organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO, which already played the role of guiding sector policies in peripheral countries.

From the 1990s onwards, these guidelines associate development with education oriented by and toward the market. In line with this analysis, Evangelista and Shiroma (2004, p. 1) systematize some of the concepts that accompany the political discourse of international organizations in the early 1990s: “[...] productivity, quality, competitiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness”.

At the end of the 1990s, the discourse of international organizations assumes a humanitarian face instead of economism, placing the solution of social problems in education. The concepts highlighted by Evangelista and Shiroma (2004, p. 2) in this period are: “[...] justice, equity, social cohesion, inclusion, empowerment, opportunity and safety”.

If in the 1990s the slogan was *Education for competitiveness*, at the turn of the 21st century the motto became *Education to fight poverty*. Certainly, it is not a fight against the roots of the contradictory social processes that generate poverty and inequality, since they are ways instituted by the bourgeois State to manage the social risks of poverty and to channel social investments to *target* audiences. The specific groups in question would be served through focalized policies, with the participation of private businesses and philanthropic foundations.

The action of the bourgeois State (Marx, 2012) to contain poverty through focalized policies, seeking to shift attention from the effects of the structural crisis of capital, was summarized by Antunes (2000) in six dimensions: fall of the rate of profit due to the reduction of productivity levels; exhaustion of the Taylorist/Fordist accumulation produc-

tion standard, combined with structural unemployment; hypertrophy of the financial sphere; crisis of the welfare state, with the transfer of public resources to private capital; widespread trend towards privatization and deregulation.

Such movement of reorganization and replacement of capital can be observed through unemployment, expansion of informal work, high rates of people with no income, homeless, and landless, and a deepening of urban and rural violence. The new model of accumulation reorganizes work at the international level, redefining inequalities between and within countries with regard to production and consumption, exploitation, and expropriation with a withdrawal of social rights.

Contradictorily, in a context of attacks against rights and transformations in the world of work, the concept of inclusion, presented as opposed to exclusion, emerges in the political discourse of international organizations linked to education (UNESCO, 1994; Dahrendorf, 1995; UNESCO, 1999a; UNESCO, 1999b; Banco Mundial, 2000; Holzmann; Jorgensen, 2000; Banco Mundial, n.d.). Its dissemination can be understood as a pillar of neoliberal educational policies linked to productive restructuring and the contradictions intensified by capital reorganization. These policies, in their facet linked to exploitation, are motivated by the new pattern of flexible accumulation, aimed at recovering profit rates. In their facet linked to expropriation, these policies are also connected to processes of policy formulation in the social and educational areas, with restrictions on public funding for public education and expansion of the educational market.

In education, the term inclusion was borrowed from progressive discourses with a post-modern bias, without reference to the objectivity of class society, as an affirmation of rights, recognition of identities, and respect for differences. However, when a dialectical analysis of reality is pursued, the term's conservative affiliation in discourse production does not go unnoticed, due to the maintenance, exaltation and adaptation of subjects to the social order. From this perspective, the concept of inclusion is repeatedly mobilized by the international bourgeoisie to restore confidence in the sociability of capital, whether through its connection with the ideas of cohesion and social sustainability or its articulation with specific areas of action of national States, such as education.

The concept of inclusion, which is contemporary to the movements of globalization of capital (Chesnais, 2001), gained prominence in the debate of social policies from the mid-1990s, with its own emphasis in the area of education and particularly in special education. Precisely in view of the deepening of the world production of social inequality, this concept gained prominence as a recommendation from international organizations to governments in different countries, assuming a multifaceted characteristic of their proposals. In practice, the usual recommendation of inclusion in education has been incorporated as different policies in different social formations around the world.

However, even though the concept of inclusion started being used in international political discourses in the 1990s, it was already present in sociological analysis in the 1960s and 1970s. From a functionalist perspective, Parsons (1966) discusses the concept of inclusion, understanding that the term portrays one of the stages of the *structure of the social system*, constituting a *differentiation* of social groups hitherto not perceived as part of society. In this analysis, Parsons (1966) relates inclusion to the need to promote *adaptive capacity* or social adaptation. Therefore, the author affirms that the dissemination of certain common values to the whole society favors its healthy development, emphasizing that before social adaptation there are other stages of development of the social structure, such as selection and differentiation. In summary, public policies for education are formulated through a liberal appropriation of the concept of inclusion, which contributes to a defense of the maintenance of the *status quo*, and consequently, the naturalization of social inequalities.

The perception of inclusion policies as a set of propositions and initiatives that are conservative of the social order and its roots, and part of a matrix of thought that mechanically explains social relations, allows us to question the aura of *innovation* and *revolution* of educational political propositions, which have even been considered as a *new social paradigm*. Furthermore, in the process of disseminating the concept as a pillar of educational policies, it has also gained a multicultural connotation.

Habermas (1998) endorsed inclusion processes in *multicultural societies* based on democracy, the rule of law, and popular sovereignty, claiming that *minorities* must be *integrated* and have their needs *equalized*, without, however, being *incorporated* in a homogeneous way. In its conception, inclusion means that a political order remains open to equalize discriminated individuals and integrate the marginalized ones, without incorporating them in the uniformity of a homogenized popular community (Habermas, 1998, p. 108). Touraine (1991 apud Oliveira, 2000), in turn, states that, in contemporary social organization, the understanding of social classes has been surpassed by an organization in the center/periphery relationship, both for national States and for individuals.

Such authors develop their perspectives by denying the existence of social classes and their relations of inequality, neglecting the apprehension of social reality. In this sense, they favor an approach to differences that does not take class struggle into account, which is a constant presence in the social metabolism of capital. The emphasis on supposedly horizontal differences, based on groups that differ in an essentialist way, favors an uncritical apprehension of the idea of inclusion in the field of will, voluntarism, and politics abstracted from the exploitation and expropriation movements that constitute contemporary capitalist social relations.

Authors who assume that class society must have an equitable dimension, and reframe the debate on social inequality based on this

category, were also found. At the turn of the century, Phillips and Berman (2001), for instance, discussed social inclusion related to the principles of equality and equity. According to these authors, in a context of *social quality*, the goal would be to provide a basic level of inclusion, with the aid of support infrastructure, working conditions, and collective goods, thus preventing and minimizing the mechanisms that cause social exclusion. In this case, inclusion policies would be able to prevent or reduce the occurrence of social exclusion situations. However, the authors do not address the issue of social inequality.

In the same period, Popkewitz and Lindblad (2001) denounced the insufficiency of measures aimed at containing exclusion or expanding inclusion by framing subjects in patterns of normality and deviation. Since inclusion policies do not address the causes of exclusion, acting in the sphere of exclusionary sociability, in some cases they only produce mechanisms to contain the excesses. According to the authors, the studies conducted by the State to determine who needs public policy interventions approach social reality as an intelligible and calculable field in order to plan their actions, indicating the presence of a managerial matrix in the State at the beginning of the 21st century. In practice, this matrix generates social policies focused on groups identified as excluded or vulnerable. These policies can vary from country to country, and contrary to what is announced, they move away from a proposal for the recognition of rights, as they do not intend to universalize them.

Therefore, inclusion policies are marked by class struggle, by the action of the capitalist State that implements them in favor of the interests of the market. In this sense, Fontes (1996) confronts liberal thinking by stating that there is a situation of *forced inclusion* into the sociability of capital, due to relations of exploitation and expropriation. The author relies on the reflections of Balibar, for whom “[...] no one can be excluded from the market, simply because no one can leave it, since the market is a form or a ‘social formation’ that does not include exteriority” (Balibar apud Fontes, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, inclusion policies justify forms of control, class domination, and strategies to minimize public spending with the most fragile fractions of the working class.

Shiroma (2001) reinforces this analysis by exploring the contribution of Levitas, who perceives changes in the approach to inclusion due to the changes in the world of work. Levitas (apud Shiroma, 2001) discusses three types of discourses on inclusion/exclusion: the redistributionist, the integrationist, and the subclass discourse. According to the author, the redistributionist discourse is concerned with poverty and its reduction through the distribution of wealth and power; the integrationist discourse focuses on unemployment and, in this case, inclusion means professional training and insertion in the labor market; the subclass discourse, in turn, works with notions such as morals, values, cultural habits. The discursive content explained here could challenge workers to restore hegemonic relations by spreading ideas of social cohesion.

Over the past few decades, the discourse of international organizations has guided the actions of national States through proposals on inclusion in a broad sense. School inclusion or inclusive education have become *slogans* of educational policies in recent years, being present in international political discourses through documents developed by the World Bank (WB) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

More recently, the sense of cohesion present in political discourses takes the form of sustainability, as documented in the Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2015) and in the proposals of the World Bank (WB, 2011). Sustainable Development Goal 4 was proposed in the area of education with the keywords inclusive, equitable, and lifelong. If at the end of the 20th century the guiding *slogan* read *Education for All* now, the World Bank (2011) reiterates the *expansion and improvement of education* as a strategy to adapt to changes and presents the new motto *Learning for All*. The human capital theory serves as a guideline for this strategy, prioritizing the economy in relation to human development. This can be observed by the direct link made between learning, economic development, and poverty reduction, autonomously in relation to educational and teaching processes. For Pronko (2014, p. 106),

[...] there has been a great increase in enrollments, retention, and gender equality at school over the past decades, especially in developing countries, as a result of the implementation of the guideline 'Education for All' established in the Jomtien Conference in 1990, and national efforts to achieve the Millennium Goals. However, according to the document, these advances, although important, are not sufficient to face contemporary challenges, and require the Bank and its partners to develop a new education strategy for the next decade. In this context, education, as a central tool for development, must no longer be considered exclusively from the perspective of schooling, but, above all, and in a strategic way, from the perspective of learning.

UNESCO is the body that most explicitly reinforces the notion of sustainable development through the purposes of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2015). Within this discourse, the terms inclusion and equity are treated as comprehensive principles that guide all educational policies, plans, and practices (UNESCO, 2019), inserting changes in relation to learning.

### **A New Cycle of Recommendations through Global Governance: education and inclusion based on equity and learning strategies**

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was a coordinated action of international organizations, producing the effect of a *global governance* (Robertson; Verger, 2012). After the *Education for All* move-

ments (UNESCO, 1990), whose principles were reaffirmed at the Dakar meeting (UNESCO, 2000), slogans such as meeting basic learning needs emerged, linked to the pillars *learning to learn*, *learn to be*, *learn to do*, *learn to live together* and the *slogans* of sustainable development and education for peace.

The discussion around this commitment defined new goals and a new deadline for their achievement, taking 2015 as the reference date. Signatory countries were urged to develop actions for the quality of education, generating satisfactory, recognized, and measurable learning results, to be verified through external evaluations. Although political discourses reiterate the notion of the right to education by defending access and quality, the concept of equity directs towards focused measures, actions aimed at incorporating vulnerable groups into education systems. The focus on learning results, in turn, is not in line with actions to strengthen the production of teachers' work and study conditions. It leads to investments in evaluations that produce data that can be monitored and compared.

A new conference was held at the end of the proposed period, the World Education Forum in Incheon, South Korea (2015). The publication of the Incheon Declaration, which proposes to address the *unfinished matters* of the Education for All (EFA) agenda and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to education (UNESCO, 2015), results from this Forum, amid a set of other debates. To this end, national States are defined as *providers* of the right to education, and must ensure quality inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, as described in Sustainable Development Goal 4 - SDG4. The importance of the education/learning/equity/inclusion relationship is described in this declaration (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7):

We recognize education as a key element in achieving full employment and eradicating poverty. We will focus our efforts on access, equity, and inclusion, as well as on quality and learning outcomes, in the context of a lifelong education approach.

Like the educational policy implemented in the US by George W. Bush in 2002, *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, inclusive political discourses announce that no one should be left behind, a *slogan* that could be considered as a universalist principle. However, this interpretation cannot be sustained when confronted with strategies aimed at the most vulnerable, which makes it possible to clearly perceive that it is a focused proposal, based on neoliberal policies.

In this new cycle of policies guided by international organizations, two strategies linked to education and inclusion can be perceived: equity and learning.

## **The Equity Strategy in the Education and Inclusion Relationship**

Returning to the political discourse of the 1990s – education as the axis of productivity with equity – the defense of access to education and a minimum standard of learning quality can be found. Such a discourse gained innovation strength to overcome the political slogan in defense of equality. In that discourse, equity was related to social justice, so that real inequalities could become more acceptable in the midst of international policies, since focalization processes contain elements of respect for differences and recognition of diversity. In this way, inclusion and equity discourses were linked to the recommendations of international organizations to think of education as an important political instrument for the reduction of poverty through focused measures. Along with this defense, there is a redefinition of the role of the bourgeois State as a centralizer and mediator of public/private strategies, generalizing a business logic in education, as explained by Freitas (2014, p. 1088):

It is sought to disseminate that the issues of education can be resolved through an effective management of the same existing forms of pedagogical organization, associated with new educational technologies, accountability, meritocracy, and privatization, motivating the consolidation of an educational neotechnicism (Freitas, 2011). These ideas generate a strong movement to adapt schools to the new demands of production restructuring and the promotion of an increase in business productivity [...].

Equity sheds light on the substitution of an equality parameter, and favors the development of liberal thought in education, both in terms of principles and in the formulation of a consensus according to which what matters are learning outcomes, not study and teaching processes and human development itself. According to (Freitas, 2014, p. 1090), “Liberals do not live with equality of results, only with equality of opportunity”. In this way, there is a dispute over the control of the provision of education and over the educational project for the provision of learning, which exposes the limits of thinking about education and learning as rights in the current world situation. For Freitas (2014, p. 101),

Equity is related to equality, but it is not equality itself. It is the guarantee of access to a right that should be for all, mediated by social justice. For new reformers, the demand for full equality in the educational process would be ‘totalitarian’, in the sense that it would violate subjects’ specificities.

In the relationship between education and inclusion, the equity strategy provides some degree of equal opportunities, but the way human subjects will deal with such opportunities in a regime of social and educational inequality, in a context of expansion of the forms of exploitation and expropriation, is an issue within the realm of individual responsibility, quite in line with liberal thought.



The Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7), links equity more directly to the education and inclusion axis, demonstrating a deepening of an action focused on the *most disadvantaged*, reinforcing that transformations must occur in the educational sphere, not in the current social relations.

Inclusion and equity in and through education are the foundation of a transformative education agenda, and, therefore, we commit to tackling all forms of exclusion and marginalization, as well as disparities and inequalities in access, participation, and learning outcomes. No education goal should be considered fulfilled unless it has been achieved by everyone. Therefore, we commit to making the necessary changes in education policies and to focus our efforts on the most disadvantaged, especially those with disabilities, in order to ensure that no one is left behind (UNESCO, 2015, p. 7).

Thus, the equity strategy linked to the education and inclusion axis reaffirms social inequalities as characteristic of the sociability of capital, naturalizing their causes and effects and reinforcing a vicious cycle of functional educational reforms to the social system.

### **The Equity Strategy in the Education and Inclusion Relationship**

In the early 1990s, ECLAC/UNESCO (1990) already stated that productive transformation implied the existence of human resources capable of adapting to the necessary changes in the sector, and that education was a condition for the economy to “[...] advance on a path of sustainable and equitable growth” (ECLAC/UNESCO, 1990, p. 121). Linking productive transformation to technology advancement, international organizations spread the idea of a type of knowledge, combined with skills, that education should be concerned with in order to meet the demand for workers adaptable to the market (new workers). This knowledge/skills connection was called *basic learning needs*. Mello (1994) uses the concept of Basic Learning Needs presented by the World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien - Thailand (1990), and states that they:

[...] comprise both essential learning tools (such as literacy, oral expression, numeracy, and problem solving) and the basic learning content (such as knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes) required by human beings to be able to survive, to develop their full capacities, to live and work in dignity, to participate fully in development, to improve the quality of their lives, to make informed decisions, and to continue learning (Mello, 1994, p. 35).

The author states that this *new profile* is associated with intelligence, knowledge, ability to solve problems, leadership, and adapta-

tion to new situations. In this way, the individual must have knowledge/skills to meet the needs of capital.

At the World Conference on Education for All (1990), member countries made a commitment to include the excluded in their educational proposal, with the rhetoric of education for *all*. Centered on basic learning needs (BLN), which are not the same for *everyone*, education is also proposed in different ways.

During the first decade of the 2000s, discourses were still based on the *slogan Education for All*, but in the second decade, they started to advocate that the goal for global development is not only schooling but also learning.

However, the engine of this development will ultimately be what people learn, inside and outside school, from kindergarten to the labor market. The Bank's new 10-year strategy seeks to achieve this broad 'Learning for All' goal, promoting reforms in countries' education systems and creating a global knowledge base strong enough to lead these reforms (WB, 2011, p. 1)

For this international organization, economic growth and poverty reduction depend on the knowledge acquired by people. However, in the same WB document (2011), it can be observed that knowledge can be acquired both inside and outside school. As Pronko (2014, p. 108) indicates, there is a "broadening" of the understanding of education, no longer based on school institutions, but on (diffuse) learning opportunities".

For the WB (2011, p. 4),

The bottom line of the Bank Group's education strategy is: invest early. Invest smartly. Invest for all. First, foundational skills acquired early in childhood make possible lifelong learning [...]. Second, getting value for the education dollar requires smart investments-that is, investments that have proven to contribute to learning. Quality must be at the heart of investments in education, with learning gains as a key measure of quality. Third, learning for all means ensuring that all students, not just the most privileged or gifted, acquire the knowledge and skills that they need. This goal will require lowering the barriers that keep girls, people with disabilities, and ethnolinguistic minorities from attaining as much education as other population groups.

In this way, learning is assumed as a strategic point that must be reached from *learning opportunities*. And it is in this regard that investments in education must be made, which, as Pronko (2014) indicates, favors training markets that promote the dissemination of individual skills and capacities necessary for development. Although according to this strategy schools lose centrality in the educational process, it is also necessary to adapt them to these new requirements, as it is not possible to do without them yet.

Reinforcing the idea that learning does not necessarily happen at school, in its document *Learning for All: Investing in People's Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* (WB, 2011), the World Bank reiterates the understanding that inclusion improves learning for all students.

There was a change in political discourses from the *slogan Education for All* of the 1990s to the motto *Learning for All*, present in WB documents (2011) and in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015). The latter, in its 2030 Agenda, places *Sustainable Development* as the Millennium Development Goal at the center of the debate (UNESCO, 2015). The 2030 Agenda indicates that "Ensuring quality inclusive and equitable education, and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all" is necessary for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2015, p. 22).

In order to fulfill its education promise, UNESCO indicates that learning is essential (UNESCO, 2019). This document suggests that there is a learning crisis, which is presented in three dimensions: learning outcomes; immediate causes, and deeper systemic causes. In this case, it is evident that learning concerns the "[...] skills acquired through education, and not just the time spent at school, which drive growth and provide individuals with resources for work and for life" (WB, 2018, p. 4). In this sense, learning as a strategy related to the education and inclusion axis suggests that workforce training does not require school institutions as we know them, nor the knowledge provided therein.

## **Education, Inclusion, and the Disputes over Special Education Policies in Brazil**

In this section, some connections between the education and inclusion axis contained in the guidelines of international organizations and special education policies from the perspective of inclusive education in Brazil will be established. In order to develop this topic in its structural and temporary dimensions, and taking into account the regime of political conservatism in Brazil, the contributions of Florestan Fernandes were sought for support, both for his political trajectory and theoretical density. Florestan (2019) highlights the political character of teachers' work in a society with high inequality levels like Brazil. In his analyses, he takes into account the elitist cultural tradition and the limited democracy in political relations in Brazil as elements that can lead teachers to play a mediation role in the chain of political and cultural domination. For him, Brazilian teachers were assigned the task of taking responsibility for the social order, establishing a civilizing level for a few, and at the same time, not being able to assume a critical position, as they have been challenged to separate their political and pedagogical beings.

He points out that, throughout the history of Brazilian education, teachers have been held responsible for carrying forward elements of the renewing bourgeois thinking for education, with proposals for educational changes announced as *revolutionary*, as the renewing ideas

of Anísio Teixeira and Fernando de Azevedo, who proposed changes to education without a correspondence in the economic and political fields (Fernandes, 2019). The author refers to essential changes to reformist conservatism. In contrast to this, he advocates that change requires struggle, a specific struggle, a social struggle between classes. In addition, teachers are encouraged to think in the context of class struggle and take a position as workers, not as uncritical mediators of the thoughts of the social order. In this sense, he affirms that in order to take action at school, it is necessary to think beyond school. It is necessary to have a *penetrating political conscience* (Fernandes, 2019, p. 82).

Throughout this article, we sought to demonstrate that the policies of inclusion in education are proposed by developed countries through their supranational governance structures, international organizations such as the World Bank and UNESCO, among others. It was also emphasized that inclusion policies are based on the premise that society is no longer organized into social classes, and that the capital/work antagonism no longer exists. According to the assumptions of postmodern thought, contemporary society is organized by the participation of groups and individuals in social life. An antinomic relationship between those who are included and those who are excluded is created based on that thought, which has no material basis (Frigotto, 2010). This political discourse without an empirical correlation has been used to formulate a consensus on the need to dissolve universalist policies based on the welfare State model developed in the central countries during the postwar period. In its place, the bourgeois State developed neoliberal policies that deny the universalist model and bet on the reduction of public investments for social sectors, focusing on excluded groups, namely those unable to seek social services (such as education and health) in the market.

Therefore, although inclusion policies have been announced as policies of education for all, they were and still are aimed at all those who cannot seek education in the market, redefining education from a right to a service. In other words, for this group, education is a focalized service, for others, it is a commodity. At the turn of the 21st century, there was a movement of policies supporting business reforms in education (Freitas, 2014), draining resources from public funds to the market, and remunerating capital.

Despite this objective materiality, policies for inclusion in education were understood in Brazil as a recognition of the right to education and the dissemination of respect for differences. Contradictorily, in a class society and in a country of dependent capitalism such as Brazil (Fernandes, 2008), this movement gained a political form of social domination and dissemination of the hegemonic bourgeois ideology. A consensus was produced by an important set of hegemonic private devices, business foundations, non-governmental organizations, among which the most important working in education in Brazil is *Movimento todos pela educação* (All for Education Movement). There was also a weakening of the class consciousness of teachers, many of whom have

embraced the slogan of inclusive education or school inclusion as a *revolution*, when in fact it is a bourgeois renovating change aimed at maintaining social order.

In Brazil, special education policies based on the inclusive perspective have been proposed in three generations. The three political propositions, according to their convenience, reaffirm the international recommendations on the topic.

The first generation of inclusive policies for special education in Brazil is depicted in the National Guidelines for Special Education in Basic Education (Brasil, 2001) under the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration (1996 - 2002). This happened during the second presidential term, when the development of neoliberal policies had already prepared a reform of the State apparatus (Bresser Pereira, 1996) that redefined education as a service and carried out an important set of privatizations of state-owned companies.

In special education, the inclusion discourse was adjusted by curriculum flexibilizations, correlated with a logic of different services that could be offered by the education systems. That was an indication of school inclusion for special education students, but not a policy of inducing enrollment in regular classes, in a coexistence of different services for different human conditions, contemplating private and assistance organizations (privatization), and without expanding investments in education systems.

The second generation of special education policies from the inclusive perspective is related to the Lula/Dilma administrations (2003 - 2016) and was announced as a special education policy from the inclusive perspective (Brasil, 2008). It is sometimes identified as “the” inclusive policy in special education in Brazil. As of 2007, a set of educational programs for student assistance and teacher training was set in motion in special education at the national level. These federal programs were linked to a broader set of policies in the area of education, gathered in the *Plano de Desenvolvimento da Educação – PDE* (Education Development Plan), with a decisive influence of the private apparatus of hegemony All for Education Movement. The presence of the business community in the formulation of policies for public education through the participation of business foundations and social organizations was evident, which is a type of privatization of education.

The special education policy was included in the PDE package and reached a reasonable consensus in the country. It was based on the inclusive perspective, understood as access, permanence, and participation of special education students in regular classes, both in Basic and Higher Education; Specialized Educational Assistance (known as AEE) as a complement or supplement to teaching in Basic Education; the institution of public facilities suitable for this purpose - multifunctional resource rooms; a national training program for teachers to work in AEE, mainly online; the establishment of a team of permanent or temporary special education teachers in public schools.

The focus of the Special Education Policy between 2003 and 2016 was the matter of accessibility through the AEE service (Brasil, 2009), but there was no emphasis on schooling processes. There were even private assistance institutions, which historically have been involved in segregated special education services, that offered the AEE service to public schools, but the multifunctional resource rooms operating in these institutions came from the public notices of the Program for the Implementation of Multifunctional Resource Rooms of the federal government (Brasil, n.d.).

Although the special education policy from an inclusive perspective has obtained a lot of support in the country, and sought to establish public/private relationships to reconcile private interests, that was not enough to appease internal resistances within the field itself, in the face of disputes perceived in the action of private organizations that have formulated special education policies since their genesis as a public policy in Brazil after the creation of the *Centro Empresarial de São Paulo - CENESP* (São Paulo Business Center) in the 1970s. When considering the political tactics of the sectors and groups that defend the right to school education, there may have been a mistake in recent years in prioritizing the defense of inclusion detached from an uncompromising defense of state-owned public schools.

The defense of school education for special education students in regular classes did not criticize the current school education project, which was established based on privatizing, discriminatory, and classificatory policies that seek to standardize performance and develop reduced competencies for human development based on the skills required by the market. Therefore, the defense of the work of special education teachers in regular schools is necessary, but not enough. Just as it is not enough for students linked to special education to be in regular schools. It is necessary to dispute the school education project as part of an educational and societal project, through political and pedagogical action, as Florestan says, knowing that this dispute takes place in the midst of class struggles.

In addition to traditional social organizations such as the Pestalozzi Society and APAE, which have national capillarity, other movements have been gaining ground by valuing their interests and fighting to determine the content of special education policies. More recently, with the pandemic and social isolation, *startups* have also been growing in education, serving the special education public with assistive technology and consultancy to school systems, as another expression of the entrepreneurial education reform that paves the way for market innovation in the sector<sup>1</sup>.

The consequences of economic crises, in particular from 2008 onwards, have an even stronger impact in the form of attacks against social policies in favor of the accumulation of capital, redistributing resources from public funds to the market. In this context, the action of political forces connected to a conservative bourgeoisie had as one of its highlights the coup d'état that prevented the continuity of Dilma

Rousseff's administration, resulting in the organization of a new power coalition with Michel Temer in the presidency of the Republic<sup>2</sup>. The Temer administration passed a Constitutional Amendment establishing a *spending threshold*, which induced the privatization of social areas and their transformation in a business field<sup>3</sup>.

The third generation of special education policies was proposed during the coalition between the administrations of Michel Temer (2016 - 2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (2019 -). Temer initiated an adjustment process in special education policies, particularly by resuming segregated services to revive its privatizing face and stop public investments in public schools, where new public facilities for special education had been established, although from an equitable, managerial, and fractional perspective. This adjustment process involved hiring consulting firms to reorganize the policies in conjunction with UNESCO (Kassar et al, 2019), to put in place a new version of these policies focused on equity, adjusting them to the Education 2030 agenda for inclusive, equitable, and lifelong education. Therefore, political forces were already being mobilized to implement the adjustment plan demanded by international capital.

The World Bank (2017) published a document entitled *A Fair Adjustment: Efficiency and Equity of Public Spending in Brazil*, with strong indications regarding fiscal issues, guiding a shift of public investments to international and national capitals. Based on this outline, the political proposition for special education took shape in Decree No. 10.502 of 2020, which determined the identification, classification, and segregation of subjects as a process for education. The decree details for special education what constitutes the current educational project in Brazil, associated with the privatization of public resources that would be allocated to the social area, which is leading to a situation considered by Leher (2020) as social Darwinism.

The decree was proposed to dismantle already unfavorable human development conditions for people with disabilities in relation to school education. This policy was implemented in conjunction with other adjustments made in Brazil, such as pension reform, the review of pensions and benefits of continued provision, contingencies and budget conditioning for education, labor reform, and the execution of the processes arising from the Covid 19 pandemic, just to mention a few of the attacks on the working class at that moment. The aforementioned decree is based on economically liberal and politically conservative principles, defending the segregation of special education students, which historically means a process of de-schooling.

Therefore, the adjustment proposed for special education in 2020 is an expression of the set of attacks on the working class, which have become stronger since the beginning of the Temer administration, and even more so with Bolsonaro. But this is not just a national movement. The Education 2030 agenda disseminated by UNESCO (2015) brings about a new cycle of de-schooling. Even though it maintains the slogan

of inclusive education, combined with *lifelong learning*, it presupposes diffuse learning opportunities with broad dimensions in relation to practical and everyday life, moving away from the process of appropriation of scientific knowledge related to schooling processes.

In 2020, UNESCO published a report entitled *Inclusion and Education: all means all, without exception*, which defends the idea of inclusion as a process. To support this statement, it presents the following data:

*In the case of students with disabilities, laws in 25% of countries (but over 40% in Asia and in Latin America and the Caribbean) make provisions for education in separate settings, 10% for integration, and 17% for inclusion; the remainder (48%) opting for combinations of segregation and mainstreaming (UNESCO, 2020, p. 9).*

In view of the worsening of the crisis of capital, considerations regarding inclusive education tend to naturalize that different countries adopt different policies according to their conditions, supposedly in respect for the differences between countries. This is meritocracy and individualization in relation to countries. And it is followed by a cynical discourse that inclusion is a process. The finding that 48% of the countries use combinations of segregation and integration policies in relation to school education reinforces the multifaceted perspective of the proposals of inclusion in education. Such a perspective expresses a naturalization of inequalities as differences between countries.

The data presented in UNESCO (2020) indicate that the schooling of special education students in the world is far from being achieved. At the same time that the recommendations contained in WB (2011) and UNESCO (2015) announce a new cycle of de-schooling proposed by international organizations.

## **Final Considerations**

Throughout this debate, the actions of international organizations, particularly UNESCO and the World Bank were discussed, based on their recommendations on educational policies between 1990 and 2020. The relevant elements were related to the education and inclusion axis, by reviewing the political propositions of the 1990s and their developments and derivations in the 21st century.

The analyzed period was marked by changes in the world of work and in the type of policies implemented by the bourgeois State due to the needs of reproduction of the capital in crisis. Such policies shifted public investments from social areas to the remuneration of capital, and adjusted educational recommendations to train workers with skills and competencies required by the market.

When analyzing the recommendations made by international organizations for the education and inclusion axis, two political strategies were identified: the emphasis on equity and learning. Equity is



discussed in relation to education and inclusion in the propositional documents of international organizations with the diversification of educational offer, such as formal, informal, segregated, integrated, and inclusive education, regulated, to a large extent, by the groups for which it is intended. Such a strategy embodies the flexibilization of curricula and the differentiation of educational trajectories for different subjects. Although equity can be understood as a proposal to replace and update the concept of equality, it in fact reinforces the mechanisms of inequality that constitute the sociability of capital.

The learning strategy, linked to the education and inclusion axis, is about the development of skills and competencies required by the market. International organizations refer to learning opportunities, which belong to the realm of individual capacities. At the same time, they consider that learning does not require school institutions as we know them, or the knowledge they disseminate.

When thinking about the forms taken by special education policies from an inclusive perspective in Brazil, the directions given by international organizations can be recognized in their propositions. Three generations of special education policies in Brazil were analyzed, and it is clear that they implemented such directions, according to the convenience of the coalition in power. These different proposals express a multifaceted perspective of inclusion in special education policies, whose variability is included in the recommendations of international organizations. Likewise, policies developed in different countries, which express naturalized inequalities, show combinations of segregation and integration proposals. The multifaceted perspective of the education and inclusion axis in special education policies, understood here as the variability of propositions contained in the *inclusive* adjective, enhances the sense of cohesion and sustainability in relation to the sociability of capital. Within the scope of educational policies for peripheral countries, it lists flexibilization of curricula and individualization of educational trajectories that, in the end, can cause lower education levels or even de-schooling processes. It is worth remembering that such propositions have been implemented through focalized policies, aimed at groups identified as those that express differences that need to be addressed by specific educational actions.

Such proposals consider the characteristics that contribute to identifying subjects as *different* as the essential ones, and remove subjects from social class relations. The challenge regarding school education is immense, and so is the challenge in relation to the subjects identified as students of special education. In order to face it, we return to Fernandes (2019), for whom working in a school implies thinking beyond school, with a strong political stance and with class consciousness.

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## Notes

- 1 According to the information available at: <<https://insights.liga.ventures/edtechs/startups-educacao-inclusiva/>>.
- 2 About the implications of the 2016 coup on special education policies, see: (Silva; Machado; Silva, 2019).
- 3 Constitutional Amendment No. 95, of December 15, 2016, which Amends the Transitional Constitutional Provisions Act, to institute the New Tax Regime, and establishes other provisions.

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