

The Production of the Subject with High Abilities in Mathematics and School Inclusion in Contemporary Education

A Produção do Sujeito de Altas Habilidades em Matemática e a Inclusão Escolar na Educação Contemporânea

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Abstract: Understanding high abilities in Mathematics as practices that amidst power-knowledge relations identify, compare, and classify the student-subjects as persons with high abilities, this article aims to discuss how power-language games produce these subject-forms in contemporary school. Our analytical-conceptual production was based on the thoughts of M. Foucault and related authors in relation to language, discursive practices, power relations, and forms of government. Following these studies, the inclusive educational policy is analyzed, emphasizing its effects on how conducts and performances are handled in the context of neoliberalism, as well as its effects on contemporary school in Brazil. Thus, high abilities constitute no mere update of nomenclature or adjustment of vocabulary, but refer to a game of power and classification that produces, in the school space, *the student-subject with high abilities* based on norms, processes, and purposes related to behavior and performance.

Keywords: Subject with high abilities, mathematics, educational neoliberalism, school inclusion, power-language games

Resumo: Entendendo as altas habilidades em Matemática como práticas que, em meio a relações de poder-saber, identificam, comparam e classificam os sujeitos-alunos como sendo portadores de altas habilidades, este artigo tem por objetivo discutir como jogos de poder-linguagem produzem essas formas-sujeito na escola contemporânea. A produção analítico-conceitual tomou como base os pensamentos de M. Foucault e autores afins, no que se refere às discussões sobre linguagem, práticas discursivas, relações de poder e formas de governo. Na esteira desses estudos, pensa-se a política educacional inclusiva, destacando seus efeitos nas maneiras de se orientarem condutas e performances no âmbito do neoliberalismo e seus efeitos na escola contemporânea no Brasil. Assim, as altas habilidades não constituem apenas uma atualização de nomenclatura ou uma mera acomodação de vocabulário, mas diz respeito a todo um jogo de poder e classificação que no espaço escolar produz “o sujeito-aluno portador de altas habilidades” a partir de normas, processos e finalidades comportamentais e performativas.

Palavras-chave: sujeito de altas habilidades, matemática, neoliberalismo educacional, inclusão escolar, jogos de poder-linguagem

1 Introductory aspects

The topic addressed in this article arises from a set of investigations on high abilities in mathematics as practices that, amidst power-knowledge-language relations, are introduced and adopted in the school’s institutional space (Bello & Jelinek, 2015; Jelinek, 2013a, 2013b; Jelinek & Bello, 2014a.). In this sense, and based on a so-called poststructuralist analytical approach, it is possible to observe such practices as producers of identities and cultural forms, and not only as manifestations of a high degree of development of a cognitive structure. Poststructuralism is a perspective that enables us to ponder on this and on other structuralisms, be it by means of language (questioning its role and the essentiality, fixity, and rigidity of its meanings), of identities (seeing them as the effect of relations of power and of signification), or of the different manners of being-subject as forces that govern and constrain our behaviors (Peters, 2000). Therefore, the practices concerning high abilities not only identify, compare and classify student-subjects as persons with high abilities, but also establish and produce forms of life (Bello & Jelinek, 2015; Jelinek & Bello, 2014b) in line with the contemporary principles and strategies of the arts of government (Jelinek, 2013c).

However, why is it necessary to address high abilities in Mathematics as practices of power and signification? And, especially, how do such practices relate to arts and techniques of

government as well as with the objectives and aspirations of school and of society in contemporary times?

In Brazil, discussions between school practices and forms of government are not new in the field of Education¹. Under a Foucauldian light, works such as those of Anadon (2012), Bello and Traversini (2011), Lopes (2009b) and Veiga-Neto (2000) have analyzed the ways of knowing, conducting, and molding the conducts of a population's set of individuals, as well as the ways one has of recognizing and conducting oneself, emphasizing how the purposes of a society are interwoven with: some rationalities; strategies and practices of government; the ways of expressing and organizing this society's truths; the ways of establishing norms for habits, customs, and performances of this society's individuals; and the cultural recognition of this society's most diverse institutions. The works of Clareto and Rotondo (2010), Bello (2012a, 2012b), Bello and Sperrhake (2016) have also been very inspiring with regard to the relations between discourse, government, and subjectivation in the field of Mathematics Education and curriculum. According to these authors, mathematical knowledge has operated as a factor that shapes conducts constituting practices that establish norms, organize, and classify individuals. This knowledge within normativity, as in a game, has guided ways of organizing and seeing the real, which are, ultimately, forms – individual and collective – of recognizing and producing subjects.

Foucault (2008b) denominated as neoliberalism the contemporary rationality of government, the form of life of the present, the rules and the conditions of a game. Through its practices, mass society is pulverized, its collective is individualized, differentiated. Each individual manages oneself, governs oneself according to one's potential, one's competitiveness. Added to the interests of this rationality is the imperative that every person must be included, in one way or another.

On this subject, Lasta and Hillesheim (2014) and Pagni (2017) have conducted research works seeking to analyze the emergence and the limitations inherent in discursive practices concerning inclusive education. For these authors, inclusion became the most convenient method of shaping behaviors, thus producing technologies that are responsible for “correcting”

¹ See the dossier: “Governamentalidade e Educação” *Educação e Realidade*, v.34, n.2, 2009. Available at: <http://www.seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/educacaoerealidade/issue/view/765/showToc>.

people who deviate from the norm, with the purpose of producing individuals that are convenient for the State.

The main objective of our discussion is to connect these and other ideas regarding the person with high abilities in Mathematics. It is in this movement from differentiation/distinction to inclusion that we intend to observe the redefinition of high abilities in Mathematics as a power-knowledge-truth game that enables the economic operation and permanence of the individuals in the age of neoliberalism.

2 The subject-form *with high abilities*

Regarding people who require special education, it seems to us that the *psy* fields describe, classify, codify, and hierarchize such people to construct and establish knowledge about them, as pointed out by Lasta and Hillesheim (2014). However, as these authors remind us, talking about and naming the different subjects is not enough – school knowledge, which comes into being through discursive practices, acquiring the status of truth, is required to promote the normalization of those who are considered different across social spaces.

Therefore, initially, high abilities will be taken in this work as practices in the sense assigned by Foucault (1995), i.e., as a set of linguistic, epistemological, and historical patterns that define and shape our actions and conducts producing subjectivities, identities, and ways of being and acting through which we are seen, referred to, described. According to the philosopher, discursive practices do not refer specifically to the activity of a subject, but to the objective and material existence of certain rules by which this subject is constituted and/or produced within social relations. Thus, *person with high abilities* is not only a simple designation, but a social form that is constituted from certain significations, practices, and behaviors that are related.

In that sense, language is more than a simple act of enunciation; it implies ways of being and acting in relation to our forms of life. By the term *language games*, Wittgenstein (2008) refers not only to a ruled character of linguistic activities, but also to an understanding of how people interact according to practices that they carry out. A form of life embraces all our habits, manners, lifestyles, actions, and behaviors; institutions on which our activities are based.

Thereby, cooking, farming, or business, as well as explaining, imagining, describing, questioning, reporting, are all practices – language games – and they can take place within and across different domains or subfields (Régnier, Bello, & Kuznetsova, 2016). It is through the notion of language games in Wittgenstein that we think normativity of and in language, i.e., it is because of the rule-governed character of language games that we establish realities according to the meanings of words that emerge from their uses in certain situations (Bello & Regnier, 2014). The way one understands the world is the way itself of being in the world. Language is the world we live in and the one that we practice; instrument and construction at the same time (Paltrinieri, 2011).

Similarly, the notions of power games and truth games in Foucault (2003, 2006, 2013) help understand how we become subject-forms based on the scientific denominations created with their own normativities and significations. Importantly, according to Foucault (2013), power should not be understood as an oppressive system, but as a set of relations whose purpose is to act or attempt to act on the conduct of the other. Considering high abilities as practices in these games means, thus, observing the set of procedures by which identities and differences between individuals are established. The identity *person with high abilities* is not just a production or fixing of sense, but also a way of establishing ways of belonging to a particular subject-form. The discourse is *explicit*, as there are no hidden meanings or secret knowledge; quite the contrary, it clarifies that which is now accepted.

During the 1960s and 1970s, for example, the meanings attributed to the gifted were related to science (mathematics and language) and art (music and visual arts) and valued qualities such as the numerical performance, memory, logical-mathematical reasoning, and speed of thought, which were all able to be measured and/or estimated through IQ tests (Jelinek, 2013a). There was a characterization of the gifted individual related to their physical and intellectual maturity. Jelinek (2013a) also explains that the changes operated by Gardner (2001) in the understanding of intelligence, especially in the 1990s, lead to believe in the existence of other abilities arising from the social and cultural environment. Based on that, several other competences and abilities are now observed, such as the spirit of leadership, of initiative, and of collaboration.

The Brazilian Ministry of Education has adopted the term High Abilities/Giftedness to distinguish certain abilities not as inherent qualities of an individual, but as evidences of a style of behavior (Alencar & Fleith, 2001). Thus, the contemporary conception of *person with high*

abilities is not only related to the school disciplinary domain, but also to the desirable social and economic behaviors, which serve as norms for classification and comparison of school subjects (Jelinek, 2013b). Children considered to be highly able may be very skilled for reading and writing and, at the same time, easily get bored and be inattentive and frustrated; they can focus very easily when a subject interests them; they may present a critical and abstract thinking while showing discomfort with repetition and memorization; they are sometimes overly active, and such behavior may be mistaken for hyperactivity.

Researchers of high abilities are unanimous regarding the relation between the context in which the child lives and the practices of know-how at the time of evaluation (Guenther, 2000, 2006; Silver, 2010; Sim-Sim, 2005; Winner, 1998). Thus, we can affirm that a child is seen as highly able in relation to a particular social group in a particular space-time. To put it in another way, an individual may be considered highly able in a specific form of life and may not be considered so in another one. If intelligence is cultural, why are high abilities not as well? Thus, there is, according to Jelinek (2013b), a power-language game of high abilities, i.e., a linguistic game that designates and signifies them, and a power game that establishes and fixes them to certain subjects.

The practices to identify such highly able individuals, which will then come to define the children, will evidence situations, objects, knowledge, and conducts that are familiar to them, because they exist in relation to the forms of life and lifestyles of these children. Analyzing different instruments and procedures² used by specialists of the Classes of Integration and Resources/High Abilities, SIR/AH, in some schools in the city of Porto Alegre, RS, Brazil, during the processes of identification and selection of persons considered as highly able, Jelinek (2013b) affirms that these instruments and procedures only value conducts that are significant and important from the point of view of the school.

It is interesting to note, for example, that, from the 27 items that make up the teacher observation form, 20 are based on behavioral characteristics, and the others refer to

² The instruments and procedures used by the specialist teacher(s) of the Classes of Integration and Resources/High Abilities (SIR/AH) of the Municipal Education Network of Porto Alegre follow the guidelines of the Brazilian Ministry of Education (MEC, 1995). Three instruments/techniques are regularly used, namely: A Form for Teacher Observation Notes in the classroom; a Self-Designation form that every student must fill to nominate oneself or colleagues as having high abilities; and an interview with the child and family, with the teacher or a personal acquaintance of the child.

comparisons among the individuals in the class, which is made evident by variations of the expression *best in*.

Form with items to observe in the classroom

Indicate, in each item, the two students of your class, boy or girl, who, in your opinion, have the following characteristics:

Table 1: Teacher Observation Form

1)	The best students of the class in the areas of language, communication, and expression:
2)	The best students in the areas of Mathematics and Science:
3)	The best students in the areas of art and art education:
4)	The best students in extracurricular activities:
5)	The most verbal and talkative:
6)	The most curious, interested, the ones who ask more questions:
7)	The most participant and present in everything, inside and outside of the classroom:
8)	The most critical toward others and themselves:
9)	Those with the best memory, who learn and retain with ease:
10)	The most persistent, committed, who reach the end of what they do:
11)	The most independent, who start their own work and do it alone:
12)	The most bored, uninterested, but not necessarily late:
13)	The most original and creative:
14)	The most sensitive in relation to others and those who are good to their colleagues:
15)	The most concerned about the welfare of others:
16)	The most self-assured and confident:
17)	The most active, insightful, observing:
18)	The most able to think and draw conclusions:
19)	The friendliest and most loved by colleagues:
20)	The loneliest and most ignored:
21)	The most badly behaved, funny, mischievous:
22)	Those you consider to be the most intelligent:
23)	Those with the best performance in sports and physical exercises:
24)	Those that stand out in manual and motor skills:
25)	Those that produce unexpected and relevant responses:
26)	Those able to lead and convey energy to encourage the group:
27)	Is there in your class a child with other special talents? Which ones?

According to the documents guiding the work of the SIR/AH specialists, for subjects to be defined as having high abilities in Mathematics, they must be mentioned in at least three of the following items: 2, 9, 11, 18, and 22. In this case, “those with the best memory, who learn and retain with ease” and “the most independent, who start their own work and do it alone” are among the items that identify a potential person with high abilities in Mathematics and that,

although we are dealing with a so-called exact science, also refer to the behavior of the individuals.

As we look carefully at the items listed in the form, we see that high Mathematics abilities are not eminently determined by strictly cognitive references or by problem-solving procedures, but are naturalized by behavioral aspects. Additionally, we can say that the truths that underlie these practices are games that constitute an objectivity for a subjectivity of the person considered as having high abilities in Mathematics.

What we propose is that these conducts, observable within the context of school practices, are enunciated, named, organized, and classified according to the rules of a game. A power-language game which constitutes and mobilizes modes of seeing and saying, that is, a system of the sayability and the visibility of the subject with high abilities.

In interviews conducted by Jelinek (2013b) with teachers of children considered as having high abilities, it is possible to ponder that the high abilities relate to the conducts seen and mentioned by the school staff. According to the author, expressions such as the following are recurrent: “he’s always had some interesting insights that surprised us in class, and we don’t know where he gets them from...”. This should be taken as given, since utterances such as this constitute enunciative forms of rulings that support desirable practices, serving as criteria to distinguish, organize, and classify behavioral states.

It becomes evident that, even if dealing with high abilities in Mathematics, characteristics and performances related to the discipline are not explored in depth by the specialists, with performativity itself being much more valued. An example of this is that there is a significant attention directed to those who “produce unexpected and relevant answers”, as mentioned in the excerpt, while the certainty or adequacy in relation to a discipline or area of knowledge are taken as less important.

Considering that the field observed in the research of Jelinek (2013b) consisted of the practices to identify high abilities, we can affirm that the subject with high abilities only *becomes* this subject in and by conduct. In this sense, this subject does not come from an essentialized subject, from an innate condition, but is produced as a subject with high abilities based on performances, which constitute the subject’s identification. Such conducts operate based on

rules, which are also constitutive and constituents of the power-language games of the school high abilities.

Best in is a widely used expression in the Teacher Observation Form, as we can observe in the items: “the best students of the class in the areas of language, communication, and expression”, “the best students in the areas of Mathematics and Science”, “the best students in the areas of art and art education”, “the best students in extracurricular activities”, “those with the best memory”, and “those with the best performance in sports”. Such items can be associated with the characteristics mentioned by the teachers in the interviews of the previously mentioned study – for example, “he/she is a distinguished student”, or “he/she was already literate in the 2nd grade, which is rare in school”, or “he/she has always stood out in relation to everyone” – which leads us to understand that the selection of persons with high abilities is strongly based on a comparative standard.

Although individualizing characteristics are valued and somehow constitute most of the questions used to define and produce a subject with high abilities, it is not enough to merely say that such individual is *this* or *that*. Modes and means of comparison need to be established, in the form of relations of otherness, which are mediated by the power-language games interwoven in the selection practices, evidencing measures and institutions of meritocratic orders and rules. If in the past an IQ test was used to compare the performance of an individual with a standard of theoretical nature, nowadays the selection processes compare individuals with each other, as observed by Jelinek (2013b), by means of the Self-Designation Form.

If this comparison among subjects is a vital condition for the functioning of the games of identification of conducts, the same form will also institute a practice of comparison of the subjects with themselves, since they will have to reflect on the different characteristics attributed to them. The student-subjects, in this case, are led to recognize themselves as good or very good subjects in at least one of the categories: mathematics, arts, gymnastics, theater, science, creation of stories, dance, leadership, reading, research, sports, creativity, writing, music, friendship, or in another area that the student may want to mention.

Therefore, it is observed that these processes of selection and identification are the expression and mobilization of power-language games, resulting in the capture of the conducts

of school subjects, transforming such conducts into behaviors that are proper of those with high abilities.

Thus, we can say that the subject with high abilities is the subject of the power-language games. That is the form which results from the subjection of an individual to the rules of language, of power, of school truths and knowledge; the form by means of which this individual is set in motion, in relation to oneself and to the others; and, also, the form by means of which this individual constitutes a subjectivity full of desires, intentions and values that are specific to a form of life.

3 Neoliberal practices and inclusion policies

In this text, the relations and forms of government not only explain the historical shifts of the techniques to govern individuals and populations, but also enable the understanding of the governmental rationality that prevails in an epoch. And it is based on this understanding that we can apprehend how neoliberalism, while a political rationality, is now seen as a practice, that is, as rational principles of action to guide the conducts, the modes of being and acting of individuals and populations.

The notion of governmentality in Foucault (2008a) is understood by Bello (2012b) as the study or the analysis of practices, rationalities and techniques of government and of the production of specific practices and technologies, with regard to the relationship between the technologies of government of the others (populations) and the technologies of government of oneself (individuals). This notion is in line with the discussions conducted so far, giving meaning to the events that provided the (re)updating of the ways of saying and seeing the person with high abilities, inserting them in the country's inclusion policies. As the motto of this process, there is the idea that those who in the past were named as gifted and who had, above all, a scientific value to the state, are currently known as persons with high abilities and have, in addition to the value already mentioned, significant social and economic values.

Saying that the subject with high abilities has significant scientific, social, and economic values means that this person meets the needs of a neoliberal rationality established in the globalized world. It also means giving these subjects visibility in the public policies of inclusion.

As an effect of the educational policy for inclusion of those who are *different* in the Brazilian regular school, in recent years there has been an increase of 194% in inclusive enrollments³ (MEC/INEP). Among these enrollments, there are also students deemed with high abilities in Mathematics, therefore we can say that high abilities are also included in what, in the context of this work, we call forms of government of individuals.

According to Salles (2009), subjects with high abilities/giftedness need specialized support, which will promote their academic, artistic, psychomotor, and social development, thus opening the doors to modern research evidence about subjects with high abilities/giftedness considering their potential as a means for the technological, the cultural, and the educational development of the State.

The identification of the subjects with high abilities is justified, since the investment in *intelligence* can be seen as a Government policy that, in the long term, benefits the State. Such aspect regards issues related to the subjection of individuals and to what we understand as governmentality or, in other words, the self-government of free subjects. In this line of understanding, Veiga-Neto (2000) adds that we can observe new educational practices that are occurring *in* and *out of* school and that are operating to produce new subjectivities. More interestingly, we can also observe how these practices relate to the current understanding regarding those with high abilities in Mathematics.

In order to be understood – and subsequently governed – this *new* subject, the one with high abilities, needed to be described and quantified. The process of identifying subjects with high abilities is now of social interest and, in this sense, it is still a normalizing and inclusive action that targets the government of the conducts of certain individuals. Such practices of government are characterized by the identification not only of subjects with high abilities, but of those who, when stimulated in their development, can become workforce capable of producing research and technology. Academic production has ratified this idea for some time, arguing, like Ferrer (2004), that the technological demands are great and the solutions to the complex problems that we experience now and will have to face in the future imply that a larger investment is made in the area of education, and especially in the education of those who have superior intellectual potential. Ferrer also supports that if we look at the fact that developed

³ Inclusive enrollment is understood as enrollment of Special Education subjects in common classes of regular education.

countries maintain programs for the development and the support of students with high abilities, we can easily conclude that it is essential to invest in talent and intellectual excellence as avidly as we have in other less valuable natural resources.

Pagni (2017), analyzing inclusive practices, remarks that something he calls *environment preparation* is required before the more elevated potentials and capabilities of the subjects can come to fruition – both in the school and in the family environment – promoting human capital development, generating gains to themselves and to others, as the neoliberal rationality posits.

To the same author (Pagni, 2017), those who are more capable or skilled at self-development would be assigned the role of protagonists, since the capacity for innovation would be strategically destined for them, providing this biopolitics configuration within neoliberalism a mobility of its own.

Thus, in contemporary times, it makes sense to talk about different abilities, since society in general has valued exaggeratedly the individualization of the subjects, seeking more and more peculiar characteristics, such as: a questioning attitude, original and divergent ideas, the ability to analyze an event from different perspectives, strong social leadership, and the ability to develop productive interactions with other subjects. That is, value has been attributed to aspects never before appreciated by the school, but extremely desirable in the competitive, meritocratic, and globalized world.

Osowski (1991), in the early 1990s, already drew attention to the fact that the relations between capital and labor are not simply economic relations; they are, above all, social relations. This author points out that such social relations are determined by the capitalist mode of production, establishing a peculiar way of life, with certain needs and achievements, generating, also, *a new person*, not only *adequate* in relation to the capitalist system but also able to strengthen it. Osowski concludes that the so-called gifted are produced concretely by the capitalist mode of production; at the same time, they embody, represent, and strengthen the capitalist system itself.

It is worth mentioning that the competitiveness of a nation is determined by the number of scientists that it can produce, and this is a prerequisite for economic development in contemporary rationality. Therefore, we need to *generate* these new persons, or produce these subjects who will sustain the contemporary neoliberal order.

Thus, it is clear that issues of inclusion are convergent with the neoliberal logic, since, by ensuring that every person is inserted in regular school, it is simpler to identify and invest in talents. However, the intention is to identify the normal and the abnormal, as well as to establish a curve of normality (Foucault, 2008a) with the objective of bringing all subjects in schools as close as possible to that which is considered to be the norm. The movement of inclusion that we observe in the current Brazilian school aims to capture the subjects that differ from the norm – among them the subject with high abilities – through a movement of individualization of the subjects in schools, and inclusion policies which ensure that all subjects receive regular school service. Inclusion of all those that are *different* in regular school does not ensure that they all receive the same education but that they may be under surveillance of the desired norm.

According to De Luca (2002), this practice of normalization is also a form of control of subjects in contemporary times, since an inclusion that follows normalization would be a way to “solve” the issue of the inclusion of those that are different in regular school, since others would also be there ensuring the continuity of a system of which they would never be, in fact, a part of. There would always be a difference between what is asked and what is possible, and this would also ensure a comfortable distance between us and the others. Employing inclusion to promote normalization would be a perverse way of having the other near, but at a safe distance.

It is through the exercise of a normative power, in inclusive discourses present not only among Special Education professionals, but among teachers and parents as well, that those who are “different” are characterized by their differences. They are segregated due to their curves of normality of development and learning (Pagni, 2017) with the purpose of bringing them as close as possible to the “normality standards.”

Based on these practices of normalization – in an endless cycle – and their support by the production of scientific knowledge and truths, we emphasize the possibility of forms of government and of the establishment of power relations over the school individuals. We say this since governmentality can be understood as an energy directed to the action of creating subjects, consisting of control, shaping, and normalization techniques.

Thus, school subjects who “stand out in relation to their social group” and “draw attention due to their creativity and commitment in a task” (Renzulli, 1984, 1986) are now of

interest to the State, since they can be prepared to become agents that meet the interests of this contemporary neoliberal rationality.

These subjects need to become citizens who live in conditions of sustainability, of self-control and entrepreneurship, and who remain always in activity, i.e., participating in the market game. However, to have everyone participating in this game, we need to provide their inclusion, even if different levels of participation are observed in production networks.

By expanding the range of inclusion, we can think it from different perspectives, as suggested by Lopes (2009a), who affirms that inclusion, by means of inclusion policies in the school, the social, the welfare, and the work spheres, functions as a biopolitical *dispositif* to promote the security of populations. By being included in groups, in official records, in the labor market, in quotas of welfare assistance, in school, etc., persons become easy targets for the actions of the State.

In other words, such actions enable the control of the human conduct of different social groups in the globalized world we live in. Thus, neoliberal logic fosters the idea that school inclusion enables this subject to be educated to enter the market game. Once this objective has been achieved, there is the need to mobilize these subjects so they remain, and minimally want to remain, included in this game. This is the way found by the State to ensure to every individual an adequate condition in relation to economic status, school, and health (Lopes, 2009a) with the intention of having these individuals circumvent situations of extreme poverty and, as a result, become part of the system.

The identification of persons with high abilities is now part of this sophisticated control strategy, so no subject eludes the eyes of the market and everyone remains within an expected range of normality (Lopes, 2009a). There is a need to allow, to a greater or lesser extent, that these subjects, who according to MEC/SEESP (1995) possess consistently superior traits in relation to an average, participate in the contemporary market game and, to this end, the school has a fundamental role.

Thus, practices to foster inclusion and identification of persons with high abilities have now at least two purposes: identifying subjects who today can present distinct characteristics – human capital of excellence – that contribute to the implementation of this neoliberal rationality,

as well as ensuring their participation in the sustainability, generation, and establishment of the market.

Also noteworthy is the fact that this neoliberal logic produces effects on the practices of selection and educational enrichment of individuals with high abilities in the micro and macro political contexts, since it affects school practices and social practices, and glorifies subjects presenting what MEC/SEESP (1995) calls a particular profile and a unique trajectory of achievements. That is, the neoliberal rationality craves subjects presenting unique characteristics for society, as well as innovative contributions, and seeks these traits in those subjects who already have a distinguishing quality in relation to their peers in Elementary School.

Highlighting subjects with initiative, “the most independent” and “the most persistent and committed”, items that make up the Teacher Observation Form, are conducts that are in line with the aspirations of the contemporary society, because what is expected from today’s subjects is that they can be entrepreneurs of themselves. Thus, demonstrating perseverance and initiative are characteristics that will favor the development of individuals who have the initiative to create their own source of income – and thus do not rely on the State - and who can deal with their own human capital.

Similarly, subjects that are “critical towards others and themselves”, as well as those that are “curious and interested”⁴, are now also a focus of interest of this contemporary political rationality, as these are conducts that, combined with initiative, set the subjects in motion in the sense of exploring and developing their work potential as capital.

Moreover, understanding that the neoliberal governmentality fosters an entrepreneurial boom in our country, giving prominence to subjects that are “the most original and creative” and “able to lead”⁵ makes sense, because possibly they will believe in their ideas, shunt the obvious, and be bold in their actions. Conducts that are essential in this logic, in which danger lies in not daring, not risking.

Furthermore, we would highlight that the school practices convey an intense continuous character regarding high abilities in Mathematics nowadays. This idea is observable in one of the items of the Teacher Observation Form, where we can read “the most bored, uninterested,

⁴ Items that make up the Teacher Observation Form.

⁵ Items that make up the Teacher Observation Form.

but not necessarily late”. That is, educational practices even accept that those with high abilities present disinterest in relation to school activities; however, the possibility that this subject may come to present a cognitive deficit is out of the question.

4 High abilities and the contemporary school

School education is what leads us to a more effective social transformation, because in it new skills are invented, adapted, and applied; it is, according to Veiga-Neto (2000), the institution that more widely and early assumes the role of *capturing* the individuals and disseminating such technologies. In relation to this potential of the school, we can say that it has been shaped to generate and regulate new knowledge, proving a useful space to set this knowledge in motion.

We can even say that, amidst this dynamics, the school has prepared the school individuals – which here can comprehend everyone, since it is understood that everyone must be included in regular school – to be integrated and live in accordance with the contemporary political-economic rationality. Therefore, the school, nowadays, functions interwoven in a neoliberal logic, acting as a normalization *dispositif* in relation to future consumer subjects and as a strategic element in the formation of that which Foucault (2008b) designates as human capital.

The role of the school stands out in this sense, because if neoliberalism understands the market as a *game* – and being a game, it is permeated by rules – everyone should be able to play it; and, in this case, even for those who do not have conditions to play, the Government should provide minimum resources that integrate them into this dynamics. Hence, the inclusion of everyone in school makes sense, because this investment is crucial to having sufficient conditions for education and for the school subjects to exercise their individuality in the market. Thus, inclusion policies aim to relieve the State in the context of social initiatives, reducing investments in social welfare assistance, but aiming at a social and economic balance. Moreover, such initiatives seek to foster maximum productivity in each subject, which generates benefit not only for the subjects, but also for the society of which they are part.

That is why it makes sense for us to talk about a subject with high intellectual capacity, with remarkable academic aptitude, which presents creative thinking, as well as about subjects presenting outstanding leadership skills, a special talent for arts and distinguished psychomotor skills⁶, because individuals who exhibit such characteristics are closer to providing extreme productivity for the State.

That said, it can be said that one of the contributions of the school towards supporting the contemporary government rationality is the development of a human capital that is strengthened in its skills and competences; in other words, the contribution to the development of subjects that are competitive and with high potential for converting their potential in increased income.

Thus, seeking the characterization and individualization of the school subjects – among them the subjects with high abilities – allows for all to be inserted in regular school and, consequently, according to Klein (2009), inserted in the logic of neoliberal governmentality, which increasingly requires the extension of the functions of the school.

Indeed, the modern school, which had as its motto the education of the most productive citizens and had no room for those that were *different* – including those reaching beyond the norm –, is in transformation nowadays to include *everyone*. The inclusive practice, which is based on behavioral norms, becomes a tool to promote the neoliberal rationality, which expects everyone to be inserted into the market logic. Hence, observing the conduct of these subjects is a practice that is part of this rationality. What is sought are children with greater potential – such as, for example, those designated as highly able.

The school thinks high abilities as something continuous, associating them with profiles of excellence and a minimally satisfactory performance in learning. However, as observed in recent studies such as those of Jelinek (2013b) and Jelinek and Bello (2014a, 2014b), high abilities in contemporary times do not constitute a continuity of understanding as we had in the past, only added with the new theorizations coming from the field of Education; nor are they a mere update of nomenclature or adjustment of vocabulary. Their signification brings with them a distinct conception of individual capable of contributing to the global insertion – economic and technological – of a whole society.

⁶ Characteristics that define the person with high abilities, according to Art. 3, Ordinance No. 69, 1986.

As we have attempted to demonstrate, what emerges is a new way of seeing this subject with high abilities in contemporary times – produced and conducted by school practices – and who has a role to play amidst meritocracy, consumption, and individualization. The capital is no longer centered on currency, but focuses on individuals. They fight one another, and define one another, believing in a wealth that comes from abilities and from a power (merit) game assigned to them. The school as a social institution is emptied of its instructive force, by prioritizing in it a role of determining and capturing those who may come to have better educational and economic conditions in our society.

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