

DISCUSSIONS ON INCLUSION IN TIMES OF BIOPOLITICS AND NEOLIBERALISM

AN ANALYSIS OF THREE THESIS

DISCUSSÕES SOBRE INCLUSÃO EM TEMPOS DE BIOPOLÍTICA E NEOLIBERALISMO

Uma análise de três teses

*DISCUSIONES SOBRE INCLUSIÓN EN TIEMPOS DE BIOPOLÍTICA Y
NEOLIBERALISMO*

Un análisis de tres tesis

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Recibido: 05/07/2023

Aprobado: 05/07/2023

RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo trazer uma discussão sobre a inclusão em tempos de biopolítica e neoliberalismo e, para tanto, apresentaremos conceitos e as compreensões sobre normalização, medicalização e neoliberalismo. Na busca por um movimento analítico, usando a metodologia da pesquisa bibliográfica, selecionamos três trabalhos defendidos pelo grupo de pesquisa GEduMaD e realizamos a leitura dos mesmos a partir das lentes teóricas apresentadas no início do texto.

Palavras-chave: inclusão. neoliberalismo. pesquisa bibliográfica.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to bring a discussion about inclusion in times of biopolitics and neoliberalism and, for that, we will present concepts and understandings about normalization, medicalization, and neoliberalism. In the search for an analytical movement and using the methodology of bibliographic research, we selected three academic works defended by the GEduMaD research group and we read them from the theoretical lens presented at the beginning of the text.

Keywords: inclusion. neoliberalism. bibliographic research.

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo traer una discusión sobre la inclusión en tiempos de biopolítica y neoliberalismo y, para eso, presentaremos conceptos y entendimientos sobre la normalización, la medicalización y el neoliberalismo. En la búsqueda de un movimiento analítico, utilizando la metodología de la investigación bibliográfica, seleccionamos tres obras defendidas por el grupo de investigación GEduMaD y realizamos su lectura a partir de los lentes teóricos presentados al inicio del texto.

Palabras clave: inclusión. neoliberalismo. investigación bibliográfica.

Inclusion in times of biopolitics and neoliberalism

In contemporary times, we are witnessing the advent of what Michel Foucault called biopolitics, a policy of social control whose parameter is to make people live. One of the faces of biopolitics, together with the mechanisms of disciplinary power, is normalization, a preponderant factor in a neoliberal society where everyone, regardless of their particularities, must be productive.

In this article, based on discussions of how the inclusion policy is conducted by biopolitics and serves a capitalist society, we seek to reflect on data produced in research carried out within the scope of GEduMaD - Group of Studies and Research in Mathematics Education, Diversity and Difference, linked to the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul - UFMS, of which all authors of this article are members and is led by the second and third author. The objective is to identify in the data produced in these researches the normalizing processes employed by biopolitics and to problematize them.

As in society, the normalization process is in Education and seeks to equalize the differences present in the school environment. According to Pagni (2017, p.258), “a series of devices was developed in order to minimize the effects of this anomalous, deficient life, which enters this institution, trying to attenuate the differentiation of these actors, capture and integrate them through of discourses on school inclusion and of so-called inclusive practices”. The issue of normalization was discussed by Foucault in the course “The Abnormals”. In this text, the author discusses the techniques of normalization and the powers connected to it as a certain type of power, which he called 'normalization power'. And he explains that the way in which this power emerged “[...] without ever relying on a single institution, but through the game it managed to establish between different institutions, it extended its sovereignty in our society. (Foucault, 2001, p. 31-32)

The questions that remain are: what are these normalization techniques? What normalizing powers are these? Let's start with the second. In the same course, Foucault gives some clues about these powers of normalization, saying that it is a “[...] power that does not act by exclusion, but by the dense and analytical inclusion of the elements. A power that does not act through separation into large confused masses, but through distribution according to differential individualities. (Foucault, 2001, p. 60).”

One of the possible interpretations of Foucault's assessment leads us to think that this normalizing power produces what we today call neoliberalism: “a moralizing technology that can lead to conduct” (Silva, 2022, p. 12). For Dardot & Laval (2016),

[...] with neoliberalism, what is at stake is nothing less than the form of our existence, that is, the way we are led to behave, to relate to others and to ourselves. Neoliberalism defines a certain norm of life in Western societies and, beyond it, in all societies that follow them on the path of “modernity”. This norm imposes on each of us that we live in a universe of generalized competition, it urges wage-earners and populations to enter into an economic struggle against each other, it orders social relations according to the market model, it forces us to justify ever-deepening inequalities, it even changes the individual, who is urged to conceive of himself and behave like a company. (p. 16)

The dense and analytical inclusion proposed within the scope of neoliberalism hides, or tries to hide, an objective: to make everyone participate in this competitive game and, for that, accepts a certain dispersion between the lags and potentialities of individuals in this game, so that everyone can play.

As for the first question, we find in Pagni (2017) an element of response. For him, normalization techniques are devices “undertaken by a general social process, developed in the field of education by institutions such as the school, in that of medicine with hospitals, in that of industrial production with factories, in that of the police force with the army.” (Pagni, 2017, p. 259).

For these positive technologies of power, in which the clues of a whole genealogy of discourses on inclusion and of so-called inclusive practices can be found, the norm assumes a political function. It works as a kind of intelligibility principle, on the one hand, due to its association with pedagogical, medical or biological, psychiatric, economic and sociological knowledge; on the other hand, insofar as it produces technologies responsible for correcting those who are beyond or below normality, with the aim of qualifying them and making them productive (Pagni, 2017, p. 259-260).

The school, supported by discourses such as medicalization, is one of the main institutions of normalization. Instead of acting by exclusion, it seeks, in Foucauldian terms, to classify its subjects as “normal” and “abnormal”, “to better take advantage of the capacities of the former and correct the incapacities of the latter so that the population can be homogenized, even if it is to create specific institutions for the latter” (Pagni, 2017, p. 261).

Thus, in the school environment, there has been a gradual increase in strategies to try to reconcile and manage dispersions that cohabit the school, such as, for example, different learning rhythms, different abilities and disabilities of students, different deficiencies and efficiencies of students, different ways of registering the contents, different forms of communication, different ways of relating, different views of the world, etc.

The subject of Mathematics also replicates these practices and even produces others, for example, at school there is the student with high ability in Mathematics, there is other who has difficulty understanding the mathematical contents and goes to tutoring, other which presents some disability that needs Specialized Educational Assistance in the area of Mathematics, other which depends on an interpreter to understand the Mathematics class, other which needs adapted material, other which needs non-conventional means to understand Mathematics, other which due to limitations intellectuals will end up making little progress in learning Mathematics, among many others.

However, this coexistence of dispersions does not necessarily mean respect and appreciation of differences and the possibility that people develop in difference, but the normalization of certain differences that will be accepted in the school environment. In other words, differences are accepted so that everything stays the same, because this way it is possible to control better. The idea that we are all equal and that we should celebrate differences is “possible” if the different act within what is expected (Razão Inadequada, 2017). In this way, some inclusion practices then serve this global project of a neoliberal society, seeking to pretentiously guarantee a sense of action and social participation.

In this regard, some discourses on inclusion bring into play, directly or indirectly, a comparative action between the so-called “normal” and “abnormal” subjects, that is, “to aspire to see in them [“abnormal”], if not a certain normality, at least a functionality for the world in which they live” (Pagni, 2017, p. 262), which shows yet another face of the cruelty of neoliberalism in contemporary times.

This view ends up being that of most family members of people with disabilities, who end up waiting for their children to normalize, as far as possible, so that they can play some role in the hierarchical scale in a society where everyone must be productive. However, the author warns:

If the prioritization of the norm, the univocity of the logic of identity and the pretension of the hierarchical order with which the world is perceived are not abandoned, the disabled will continue to be seen – when they are not treated as objects of knowledge and technologies used to make it a productive element in the system –

with preconceptions of subject-patients of a correction by therapists, subject-students of training or information by teachers and subject-children of a personal aspiration by parents. (Pagni, 2017, 262).

According to the same author, we must fight the conversion of norms into regulations, rationalities and knowledge that are (im)posed as unique regimes of truth in which people with disabilities would be objects to be included, never actors.

This is because their performance in the world to express their way of being and being, as well as the type of relationship they have with life, with themselves and with their difference, from this perspective, seems to be mediated by someone else, be they professional, teacher or family members, supposedly superior in their capacity, who speak for them, even if they do not always see them and, when they see them, mask their difference from others to make it assimilable by the majority (Pagni, 2017, 262).

Some discourses on inclusion that are supported by this vision, driven by neoliberalism, reinforce the logic of the entrepreneur of the self. In this sense, the school and other institutions put in motion a variety of techniques to recognize limitations and potential of individuals so that they can be better managed not only by the system, but also by the individual himself.

This evaluation “allows the recognition of the [‘]innate[‘] elements and what can be acquired by individuals, demanding maximum productivity and efficiency from each one, by knowing how far their machine-competence can reach, what are their eventual wear and tear and capacities” (Pagni, 2017, p. 263). In addition, this assessment also considers the time spent by parents with their children, family culture, environmental stimuli, medical care, hygiene, among others (Pagni, 2017).

In this context, discourses and so-called inclusive practices appear together with the action of public policies, seeking to guarantee the rights of minorities, “under the influx of social movements that often undertook within an identity logic and, unfortunately, an economy of human capital that seeks to value differences in what can favour innovations, efficiency in the enterprise itself and, finally, favour market mobility” (Pagni, 2017, p. 265).

As we propose to discuss, the discourse of inclusion, within the scope of the neoliberal society in which we find ourselves, aims, through disciplinary and control mechanisms at the individual level and through the management of the population through biopolitics, a homogenization, a normalization of individuals, not in an attempt to fit everyone into the same model, but in the management of the capacities and incapacities of individuals so that everyone can be productive in society.

However, we need to think about the inclusive process in a different way, because in the terms discussed above, the inclusion policy as it has been conducted tends to nullify the struggles in the sphere of ethical differentiation and the affirmation of life and also intensifies “the dispute between its own players within that game and asserting the force of exception, exclusion, segregation, of those who occupy a better position – majority – over those who are supposedly at a level below theirs.” (Pagni, 2017, p. 268)

Thus, it is necessary to seek a more radical vision of inclusion, seeking an education in which each one has the possibility of transforming himself based on difference, without the massive normalization of the “different”. To this end, it would be important for the “different” to assume the position of subjects of the inclusion process or at least express themselves in their ethical difference, thus, each one within their limitations and potentialities could be announcers of difference or at least express a “abnormality”. This process is complex because it demands a different type of rationality and also implies that each one takes care of himself and can produce his life in difference, it implies “walking the razor’s edge, between a life that fades away due to the current exercise of the technologies of the biopower, economic rationality, and another that flees from the latter, overlapping, remaining or exceeding it, by other rationalities.” (Pagni, 2017, p. 270).

In this perspective, we understand that we can seek an inclusive education,

[...] from the radical change in the educational model, it welcomes EVERYONE, regardless of their particularity, whether biological, sensory, intellectual, social, cultural, economic and/or political. This implies

a conception of education that understands all the students' educational needs; who doesn't have a student archetype; that does not require any adaptation from anyone to participate in it; that its praxis contemplates everyone without having to develop special procedures to deal with some; that the curriculum takes into account environmental and personal particularities, and also guarantees the quality of teaching; In other words, an inclusive education must be guided by attitudes of respect and appreciation of the different ways of knowing, doing, being and living together. (Rodrigues; Lubeck, 2018, p. 3)

These propositions obviously unfold on Mathematics and its didactic-pedagogical tradition at school, which from comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and exclusion, not only contributes to school/social processes of normalization of individuals, but also operates its own processes normalizers. Faced with these aspects of school Mathematics, it is necessary to think of ways to deal with it in a way that meets the problems and propositions discussed so far, and that people can live, coexist, and develop in difference.

Therefore, in this article we chose the Bibliographic Research as a methodological procedure for an analytical look at issues related to Inclusive Education in data produced by research developed within the scope of Group of Studies and Research in Mathematics Education, Diversity and Difference, called GEduMaD in Brazil. According to Gil (2002, p. 44):

The bibliographic research is developed based on material already prepared, consisting mainly of books and scientific articles. [...]. Research on ideologies, as well as those that aim to analyse different positions on a problem, are also usually developed almost exclusively through bibliographic sources.

However, we do not assume the idea of bibliographic research strictly to review the literature or bibliography, but, from the perspective of Lima & Mito (2007), to an ordered set of procedures to search for explanations and relationships, not random, about the study object. In this sense, we believe that the precepts of Bibliographic Research will be able to meet our desires.

A brief analytical move

In the search for an analytical movement, from the understanding that Inclusive Education must contemplate any group that is in social vulnerability, among the works developed within the scope of GEduMaD, we selected three that addressed the following groups: people with disabilities, egress from the penal system and field school actors. We also read them, based on the theoretical lenses presented in the previous subtitle, and listed data produced in these studies that could help us to discuss issues of biopolitics. We also see the possibility of an important and necessary look at how the group has been moving and a possibility of reflecting on our views and positions, based on theoretical references that are not necessarily those used in the group's research.

The first work that composes this analysis is that of Braga (2021). In this thesis, results of a Master's in Mathematics Education research developed with the Postgraduate Program in Mathematics Education of the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS) in the research line "Teaching and Learning of Mathematics" are presented. The general objective was to understand how the Specialized Educational Service (AEE) is configured for students with visual impairments in the context of Inclusive Mathematics Education in Campo Grande/MS. The work was carried out through interviews with three teachers who work at the AEE and two visually impaired students.

Data 1: "I stopped in the 5th grade [Elementary School], finished the 5th grade and went to the 6th. I stopped because I was losing my eyesight and *couldn't copy from the board. There at the school, there was no one to prepare the material*, neither in Braille nor enlarged. [...] we lived in the countryside, [...], on a farm, that's why I stopped." (Speak of Rosa, extracted from Braga, 2021, p. 81, emphasis added)

Data 2: "Ah, in short... I'll start from the beginning... when I discovered that I had this visual impairment, I was studying in a *normal school*, I was having difficulty in school. I studied at night and, when I found out I had this disease, *I arrived at school and told the teacher that I couldn't copy it from the board because I couldn't see. He turned around and told me that I was going to have to leave school because he didn't have time to go through things [content] in my notebook.* [...] I stayed until the middle of the year at school with the greatest

difficulty because there were some *teachers who didn't give any support, they said that I had to go after the school coordination to get material* and I depended on the help of the students in the room to copy, that was even during the vacation [at the end of the first semester] in the middle of the year. When the mid-year vacation arrived, I didn't have a grade, there were subjects that I had zero because I couldn't get a grade, there were activities on the board, some teachers who didn't support me, I said: *"I'm not coming back" and I didn't I went back. Since then, I think I went four or five years without going to school.*" (Irene's speech, extracted from Braga, 2021, p. 84, emphasis added)

Data 3: "The SRM [Multifunctional Resource Room] is our base. In my case, I attend the *regular class, in a non-specialized school*. Sometimes, there are things that I don't understand at the time, then when I arrive at the SRM, I say: "Professor was said like this, like this, like this in the classroom. The teacher explained this and this, now I want you to teach me how I do this here". Me, in my field of vision, in my time, because there [at school] it's a very busy thing. So, *for me it's important, I think, that even more SRM than the normal room.*" (Irene's speech, extracted from Braga, 2021, p. 85, emphasis added)

It is possible to notice in Data 1 and 2 that exclusionary processes, starting from people or institutions that are in a superior position, made two students with visual impairment stop studying. The lack of support from the school, deficit in teacher training, attitudes, or speeches of members of the school community can potentiate and produce exclusions, such as those we observed above; there is a guarantee of access to the school environment, but there is no effort to guarantee permanence, as the student must adapt to the place and the others who are there.

In Data 3, we observed a visually impaired student talking about the normal, mentioning normalization. What would a normal class or room look like? Is it a room that has all the other students without a sensory limitation? She continues the speech and mentions that, in her opinion, the Multifunctional Resource Room, which is the one that she and the other students who are the target audience of Special Education attend, is more important than the normal class, which is the environment which should be inclusive, welcoming, respecting, and valuing differences.

Data 4: "With this, specialized institutions played an important role in the growth of Special Education, because, although they were not part of the common school, they invested a lot in preparatory workshops for work, so that people with disabilities who were assisted, learned a trade and, with that, had a development that enabled them to occupy positions in the labour market. (JANNUZZI, 2012)" (BRAGA, 2021, p. 32)

Even though Data 4 is associated with a specific historical moment, the passage reinforces neoliberal ideas, since there is an overvaluation of insertion in the labour market to the detriment of broader school and social inclusion.

It is important to point out that when we mention the discourse of inclusion, within the scope of the neoliberal society in which we find ourselves, we do not want to focus only on people with disabilities, but on education for all, without distinction. Therefore, we will bring two more works that deal with a broader perspective, which goes beyond Special Education.

The second work that makes up this analysis is that of Silva (2021). In this thesis, we present the results of a master's degree in Mathematics Education developed with the Postgraduate Program in Mathematics Education at the Federal University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UFMS) in the research line "History, Philosophy and Mathematics Education". The general objective was to investigate perceptions and critical-educational beliefs of Mathematics educators who serve peasant students by addressing peasant knowledge (ethnomathematics), social issues and critical training in their classes. The research was carried out in a rural school that serves high school students. A questionnaire was carried out on two worksheets and intensive interviews with four teachers, all of whom had a full degree in Mathematics.

Data 5: "I think my classes are inclusive. Not entirely, but they are. *Perhaps because of the number of students in the room, it is not possible to do a differentiated work, but I always try to present the contents in a less complicated way*, to reach the maximum of each student. I have students with PCD (persons with disabilities), for them, I do both, *I do activities in smaller amounts*. In quarantine, for example, they performed other complementary activities. I always start with the base, such as multiplication with a comma, then theorem, formula, and so he applies the multiplication to the theorem. *For the other students without disabilities, I go*

straight into the theorem. My classes are not very inclusive because of the time constraint. I only have four classes. How to work the necessary content in different ways in such a short time? If the teacher cannot reach the goals, the demands come” (Speech by Professor N, extracted from Silva, 2021, p. 106, emphasis added)

This statement, in addition to showing an internal contradiction, reinforces the categorization “people with disabilities/people without disabilities”, reinforcing stereotypes and inequalities of treatment by the professional in question. This is noted in “For other non-disabled students, I go straight into the theorem”. It can be seen from the speech of Silva's (2021) research collaborator that he feeds a prejudice against people with disabilities by establishing a hierarchy among students, distancing himself from the radical perspective of inclusion presented in the previous subtitle.

The position of the research collaborator in question, based on the idea of norm, disregards that students, regardless of whether they are people with disabilities or not, may have difficulties and “getting straight into the theorem” can be the beginning of learning problems and school gaps.

The passage “If the teacher cannot reach the goals, the demands come” opens wide the neoliberal dynamics in the school environment. We watch schools and their subjects operate as true companies. Walking through the aisles, you can smell competitiveness, demands for productivity, individualism... But you also smell resistance and hope.

Data 6: “When I went to teach rural students, in some substitutions, *I couldn't see the difference, because it was the same book, the same contents, the same practice.* The mathematics book used was Paiva, a single volume. [...] And some readings from the school textbook, very little, did not deviate from that. The classes were like that. [...] In the formulation of the classes, I think that the teacher has to use his potential, make a transposition of the content to be explained from the real context of the students. So, the teacher will have to set up his class, create it, he won't have ready material to reach the peasant culture and identity. Different material will have to be produced from the one they send us, which we have access to through the education network, and there will have to be an opening for other ways of solving to be contemplated, especially those that students bring from their reality, from the idea of problematizing situations and see how the student will respond.” (Professor T's speech, extracted from Silva, 2021, p. 121-122, emphasis added)

In this data, we realize that exclusion does not only occur with people with disabilities. In this case, we have rural students being excluded for not having access to information, activities, or textbooks consistent with their reality.

The third work that composes this analytical movement is that of Rilko (2020). In this necessary and important thesis, results of a Master's in Education research developed with the Graduate Program in Education of the State University of Mato Grosso do Sul (UEMS), Campus of Paranaíba, in the research line “Curriculum, teacher training and diversity”. The theme developed was the process of inclusion of adult students serving time on parole and attending Youth and Adult Education in a regular school. The general objective was to research which teaching practices can contribute to the inclusion of these individuals - who have committed infractions, come from the prison system and are on parole, are students of Youth and Adult Education in a municipal night school with the Youth and Adult Education (EJA) teaching modality. That thesis reads:

Data 7: “It is undoubted that the education of Youth and Adults plays a salutary role, especially in terms of *providing students with better conditions of access to the labour market*, as well as overcoming the state of social marginalization that these are faced with the graphocentric society” (P5's speech, extracted from Rilko, 2020, p. 64, emphasis added).

Data 8: “I see it as an escape valve to make up for the time when many young people and even adults struggle to make up for lost time at school, to *enter the job market and compete with them.* Also returning to school, he finds the opportunity to be a recognized person in the environment in which he is inserted and even in the middle of society” (P7's speech, extracted from Rilko, 2020, p. 69, emphasis added).

Data 9: “In this way, EJA emerges as a way to combat these inequalities, it opens up possibilities, not previously acquired, *for these excluded students to enter the labour market, or remain in it*, as the professor in question mentioned” (RILKO, 2020, p. 63, emphasis added).

Even if the search for insertion in the labour market is a political struggle of the subjects who participate in the EJA, especially adult students who are serving time, the highlighted speeches seem to show that the so-called inclusive discourses in this context are aligned with neoliberalism. This is demonstrated by the emphasis in all three previous data on seeking labour market participation and not questioning the status quo.

Furthermore, in Data 8, one of the research participants in question uses the term “to compete”. Note that the school, embodied in this case in the EJA, is seen as a space for inclusion that prepares its subjects to *compete* in the job market. This discourse corroborates the discussion raised by Pagni (2017), presented earlier.

The author's theorization, present in data 9, shows that EJA is seen as a “way of combating these inequalities, it opens up possibilities, previously not acquired, for these excluded students to enter the job market, or remain in it” (Data 9). This data suggests that the fight against inequalities is at the service of maintaining the participation of a labour market, which operates in the logic of neoliberalism. The use of the expression “or remain in it” reinforces competitiveness and self-employment.

Final considerations

In this article we present a perspective on how inclusion can be interpreted in times of biopolitics and neoliberalism. We seek to discuss how the discourse of inclusion within the scope of Biopolitics aims, through disciplinary and control mechanisms at the individual level and through the management of the population through biopolitics, to normalize individuals, not in an attempt to fit everyone into a single model, but the administration of certain differences, capacities and incapacities, which will be accepted in the sense that everyone can be prepared so that, in some way, they can be productive in society.

In view of this theorization, through bibliographical research, we carried out an analytical movement of three works defended in GEduMaD, which approach groups in social vulnerability, such as: students with hearing impairment, former prisoners, and actors from the rural school.

From the data analysis, we noticed signs of how the inclusion in these works sometimes intersects neoliberal discourses. It is possible to observe normalizing processes in the data we analyse, for example, in the first research we have teachers and institution excluding students with a visual limitation, as they could not see the blackboard like the other students considered normal, so much so that these students say they prefer the specialized care room, which they would be segregated than to be included with all students in a classroom. In the second research, we noticed another teacher having a slightly different view of normality, which states that students with disabilities have difficulties in Mathematics, as if other students could not also present difficulties. In the third and final survey, we saw adult students who are returning to school in search of a job market placement, and the students in question are on parole. It is possible to perceive in the data discourses that are said to be inclusive, but which in fact are not. Moreover, it is possible to observe that the fight against inequalities is at the service of maintaining the participation of a labour market, which operates in the logic of neoliberalism, reinforcing competitiveness.

Our intention with the presentation of the theoretical framework and with the analytical movement was not in any way to judge the selected works, on the contrary, we seek to broaden our theoretical horizons and envision possibilities for new research agendas for the GEduMaD.

Thinking about inclusion in times of biopolitics and neoliberalism can give rise to a feeling of fragility and weakening, given that in this context there is a dynamic of competitiveness, individualism, control, self-entrepreneurship, business logic, etc. However, it is necessary to remember that in this scenario there are also possibilities of resistance, production of events, counter-conducts, that there are people committed to an inclusion that enables autonomy, self-care, emancipation, and transcendence.

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