

**DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND EDUCATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH: THE INTERDISCURSIVITY OF EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE BASIC EDUCATION WITHIN STATES OF THE NORTHEAST REGION**

ANÁLISIS DE DISCURSO E INVESTIGACIÓN EM POLÍTICA EDUCATIVA: LÁ INTERDISCURSIVIDAD DE LA EVALUACIÓN E ACCOUNTABILITY EN LA EDUCACIÓN BÁSICA EM LOS ESTADOS DE LA REGIÓN NORDESTE

A ANÁLISE DE DISCURSO E A PESQUISA EM POLÍTICA EDUCACIONAL: A INTERDISCURSIVIDADE DA AVALIAÇÃO E ACCOUNTABILITY NA EDUCAÇÃO BÁSICA EM ESTADOS DA REGIÃO NORDESTE

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to reflect on discourse analysis as a theory and research method for studies on education, especially on educational policy. It presents a theoretical reflection on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and an analytical example, having as the object of analysis the assessment policy of basic education in states of the Northeast Region and its articulation with accountability mechanisms. The results revealed that the dimensions/pillars of accountability's concept (evaluation, answerability and enforcement) undergo an interposition of meanings, but clearly come closer to management elements, which are being consolidated in educational policy.

**Keywords:** Educational Assessment Policy; Accountability; Critical Discourse Analysis; Northeast Region; Basic education.

**Resumen**

Este texto presenta reflexión acerca del análisis del discurso como teoría y método de investigación para los estudios sobre educación, de manera especial sobre la política de la educación. Tener una reflexión teórica sobre el análisis crítica del discurso (ACD) y um ejemplo analítico, adoptando como objeto de estudio la política de evaluación de la educación básica en

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los estados de la Región Nordeste y su articulación con los mecanismos de *accountability*. Los resultados revelaron que las dimensiones/pilares del concepto de *accountability* (evaluación, prestación de cuentas y responsabilización) sufren una interposición de significados, pero abordan claramente elementos de la gestión gerencial, que se están consolidando en la política educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Política de Evaluación Educativa; *Accountability*; Análisis Crítico del Discurso; Región Nordeste; Educación Básica.

### Resumo

O presente texto busca realizar uma reflexão sobre a análise do discurso como teoria e método de pesquisa para os estudos sobre educação, mormente acerca da política educacional. Apresenta-se uma reflexão teórica sobre a Análise Crítica do Discurso (ACD) e um exemplo analítico, tomando como objeto de estudo a política de avaliação da educação básica em estados da Região Nordeste e sua articulação com mecanismos de *accountability*. Os resultados revelaram que as dimensões/pilares do conceito de *accountability* (avaliação, prestação de contas e responsabilização) sofrem uma interposição de significados, mas claramente se aproximam de elementos da gestão gerencial, em consolidação na política educacional.

**Palavras-chave:** Política de Avaliação Educacional; *Accountability*; Análise Crítica do Discurso; Região Nordeste; Educação Básica.

### Introduction

This text aims to reflect on discourse analysis as a theory and research method for studies on education and educational policy. To this end, it presents a theoretical reflection and an analytical example, defining the object of analysis as the policy for evaluating basic education in states in the Northeast Region of Brazil and its articulation with accountability mechanisms.

In Brazil, the national taste for the use of external assessments was consolidated in the 1990s, through the institutionalization of the Basic Education Assessment System (SAEB)<sup>3</sup>, as announced at the National Institute of Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP / MEC), comprising

[...] a set of external assessments on a large scale. Its objective is to carry out a diagnosis of the Brazilian educational system and some factors that may interfere with the student's performance, providing an indication of the

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<sup>3</sup> Sistema de avaliação da Educação Básica (Basic Education Assessment System). Inep Portal, Brasília. Available at: <http://portal.inep.gov.br/web/guest/educacao-basica/saeb>. 10 mar. 2019.

quality of the education that is offered. The information produced aims to support the formulation, reformulation and monitoring of policies in the educational area at the municipal, state and federal levels, contributing to the improvement of the quality, equity and efficiency of teaching.

In 2005, the national educational assessment policy is strengthened through the implementation of Prova Brasil (*Brazil Exam*) and the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB), producing strategic instruments to control what is taught and what is learned in school depending on the data generated by the school and not just by region and state.

In that same decade, state and municipal evaluation systems were installed following the examples of the models of SAEB. Taking the twenty-six federal entities as a reference, it is computed that twenty of them, plus the Federal District, had their own assessment systems for Basic Education under development in 2018<sup>4</sup>. It is noteworthy that seventeen states receive direct advice from the Center for Public Policies and Education Assessment (CAED)<sup>5</sup>, an agency linked to the Federal University of Juiz de Fora<sup>6</sup>, located in the state of Minas Gerais.

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<sup>4</sup> Survey conducted on the websites of the State and Federal District Secretariats of Education, and on the website of the Center for Public Policy and Education Assessment (CAED).

<sup>5</sup> The Center for Public Policy and Education Assessment (CAED), at the Federal University of Juiz de Fora (Minas Gerais), is an institution that operationalizes (designs and develops) state and municipal programs to measure the performance of students in public schools. <http://institucional.caed.ufjf.br/>.

<sup>6</sup> CAED has assisted several states and municipalities in the country in the implementation and monitoring of Educational Assessment Systems, in the last twenty years, starting with the experience in its state of origin - Minas Gerais, expanding to other regions, including the Northeast Region, since the 1990s, with the implementation of Educational Assessment Systems in the states of Ceará and Pernambuco. Between 2011 and 2012, the agency expanded this advisory service to the states of Alagoas, Bahia, Paraíba, Piauí and, in 2016, to the state of Rio Grande do Norte.

**Figure 1 - Brazilian States with their own Assessment Systems for Basic Education**



**Source:** Developed by the authors based on the website of the Education Secretariats and on the Evaluation Portal.

As we can see in Figure 1, only the states of BA, SE, RR, AP, MT and SC, in the year of 2018, did not have proposals for educational assessment of their education systems in a systematic way, demonstrating that, in Brazil, this proposal is not just a trend, but we may as well consider that it is already consolidated.

Several studies (BROOKE; CUNHA, 2011; FREITAS, 2011, 2012; XIMENES, 2012; AUGUSTO, 2012; BONAMINO; SOUSA, 2012; NARDI; SCHNEIDER, 2015) have been portraying a scenario of formulation and implementation of educational assessment and accountability policies.

In the midst of this debate, while the discourse on evaluation, enforcement, regulation and accountability, expands and strengthens itself within education policies, it also becomes increasingly complex. This is because this discourse appears in the literature with different senses and meanings, even if they are complementary.

Thus, in order to capture social changes in the context in which educational assessment policies emerge in the states of Brazil's Northeast, a particular social

practice of the study proposed here, Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) serves the purposes, as it proposes to

[...] to bring together linguistically-oriented discourse analysis and social and political thought relevant to discourse and language, in the form of a framework which will be suitable for use in social scientific research, and specifically in the study of social change. (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992 p. 62).

For this approach, discourse is considered a social practice, therefore, a practice of representing and signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, 64). Discourse is socially constitutive, while at the same time it is both shaped and constrained by social structure. Thus, there is a dialectic between discourse and social structure.

One of the interests of current researchers who dedicate themselves to this theme was to apprehend new and current meanings that constitute the field of research in education and, especially, in educational policy and its relationship with the current reality of educational assessment policy in Brazil, so that we understand discourse analysis to be an important method in the pursuit of this goal. We have chosen to present the Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA), developed by Fairclough (1992), as, for him, discourse is an element of social life interconnected dialectically with other elements, and may have constructive and transformative effects on other elements.

Hence, we seek to present the CDA as an appropriate method for research in educational policy, as one of its specificities is the unveiling of social relations and power relations that are inherent to the processes of formulation and implementation of educational policies. Moreover, we argue that research in education, as a field of social research, focuses on social life phenomena, which leads us to agree that the specificity of its investigative processes is characterized as a permanent research of questionings in the face of facts and phenomena of social life (FERREIRA, 1998, p. 85).

In this sense, we used discourse analysis as a method in order to analyze the policies of basic education assessment in the states of the Northeast Region, aiming to

define the meanings of educational accountability present in them. Thus, we organized this article by initially presenting a general discussion about CDA with a focus on the fundamentals of the CDA in Fairclough (1992); we also make a quick contextualization and highlight some theoretical and conceptual aspects about the object of study, that is, the policy of evaluating basic education in states of the Northeast Region and its articulation with Accountability mechanisms; at last, we present an example of research developed based on this aspect of discourse analysis.

### **CDA: theoretical and methodological approaches as a reference for research into educational policies**

Educational policies, understood as public policies, mobilize several theoretical-conceptual or disciplinary perspectives (AFONSO, 2001). More explicitly, education policies are treated as components of the set of social policies, understood as the expression of the social action (or non-action) of the State, and which refer to the machinery of government, in the regulatory process of the educational sector in interaction with distinct actors or collective subjects that constitute this social process (MULLER; SUREL, 2002; AZEVEDO, 1997).

From this perspective, educational policy is inserted in the social processes of debate and dispute over the Social Project. Consequently, broad participation is essential in the constitution of public policy and, in turn, it does not exist without discourse. Hence, “[...] the objectives and details of public policies cannot be expressed except in and through discourse. Therefore, there are no public policies outside discourse” (GOMES, 2011, p. 22-23). The author also states that the educational policy structurally constitutes 'relations', 'plots' and 'conflicts', which points “[...] out the diverse, multiple, complex, conflicting and interdiscursive condition of public policies” (GOMES, 2011, p. 23), also highlighting “[...] the set of social institutions that care for the very appearance of public policies as discourse, such as the State, the government, the academy, the school and the ideologies” (GOMES, 2011, p. 25).



In light of this conception of education and educational policies, we reflect on the discourse as a political phenomenon, which, in contemporary societies, assumes a fundamental relationship with the processes of social conservation and transformation. However, an important piece of advice from Gomes (2011), regarding the research in this field, deserves to be pointed out:

[...] the study of public policies implies the understanding of the politico-social constitution of the world as an expression of multiple forces, relationships and processes. This advises to practice research practice in a non-judgmental way, problematizing and overcoming the essentialist conceptions that are commonly attributed to research instruments, methods and tools (GOMES, 2011, p. 27).

This is the reason why we have chosen to emphasize discourse critical studies, which focus on the view of language as an intrinsic element of the material<sup>7</sup> social process for the understanding of social phenomena.

Discourse analysis, as a theory and method of explaining reality, has been gradually establishing itself in the field of social sciences. Mikhail Bakhtin is one of the classical authors who had a great responsibility for this phenomenon. His reflections, which place social interaction as the main focus of language studies, have affected different areas of knowledge, strongly influencing discourse analysis. To him, language is a sociohistorical product, a form of social interaction performed through enunciations. This author sees language as something concrete, the outcome of each speaker's individual manifestation, thereby valuing the enunciation, the linguistic event (BAKHTIN, 1981). The timeliness of this author's thought anticipated the main concerns of modern Linguistics and is recognizable in the main critical approaches of discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is characterized by having several schools and lines of thought. Fairclough (1992), whose theory is also influenced by Bakhtin's ideas, classifies discourse analysis approaches into two groups, according to the nature of their social orientation

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<sup>7</sup> See Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 1992.

towards discourse: non-critical and critical approaches, and his proposal falls into the latter.

Fairclough (1992) labels as non-critical the following approaches: Sinclair and Coulthard's assumptions for the description of classroom discourse; the ethnomethodological work of Conversation Analysis; Labov and Fanshel's Therapeutic Discourse Model; and Potter and Wetherell's approach. The critical approaches he includes are: Critical Linguistics of Fowler et al. and the French approach of Pêcheux. Based on the characteristics he lists to classify the approaches, we can add to the list of critical approaches Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Fairclough's own Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis (TODA).

In the wake of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), over the last decades, the field of educational policy research has been approaching Norman Fairclough's Social Theory of Discourse, presented in his book *Discourse and Social Change* (published in 1992). This approach "[...] attempts to address and work with social practices through the union of linguistics and social critical science, identifying the connections between power relations and linguistic resources present in the discourses of people and or their social groups" (RESENDE; RAMALHO, 2004, p. 188).

In his *Social Theory of Discourse*, Fairclough (1992) sees discourse as a social practice, that is, in addition to being a means of human communication, it has the status of an element of historical construction, in the context of a given order, in which history, language, and ideology are observed. By denying the idea of a neutral language - the positivist view -, it relies on the structuring of a distinguished epistemological base, established in the context of a social criticism of the traditional approach.

In this sense, " Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning." (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 64). Fairclough (1992) proposes an epistemology that focuses on seeking ways of social change, sustained by a dialectical approach that considers history and social contexts as the foundation of the study of social problems, and states that it is necessary to search for solutions from a critical perspective.



When considering that the educational policy is a social practice, we are supported by Marques, Andrade and Azevedo (2017, p. 68), who tell us that it is “[...] eminently a field of dispute, of struggles for hegemony, of articulatory practices. It is, therefore, [...] a 'terrain' not sutured, but crossed by contingent relations [...]”, which points to an investigation based on a qualitative approach, prioritizing the intensity and complexity of the phenomena, rather than their statistical or numerical representation, which includes the discourse theories and the CDA.

In order to work with discourse in the context of investigating social change, Fairclough (1992) suggests that four minimum conditions should be considered for a discourse analysis approach with this purpose, taking into account that such a perspective emphasizes a dialogical relationship with other social theories and methods.

The first condition points to the use of a multidimensional method, which aims to analyze the relationships between discourse and social change, and also to relate the detailed properties of texts to the social properties of discursive events.

The second condition presented by Fairclough consists of a multifunctional analysis method to assess changes in discursive practices that contribute to changing knowledge, social relations and identities, in the perspective of the Systemic Theory of Language, by Halliday (1978 apud FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 8), which sees “[...] language as multifunctional, and sees texts as simultaneously representing reality, enacting social relations, and establishing identities”. Hence, there is an articulation between these three areas. Fairclough (1992, p. 9) also advises connecting this theory of language to “[...] the emphasis upon socially constructive properties of discourse in social-theoretical approaches to discourse such as Foucault's”.

The third condition is a method of historical analysis, which, according to the author, should focus on the “[...] structuring or 'articulatory' processes in the construction of texts, and in the longer-term constitution of 'orders of discourse'” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 9), in which the processes of “intertextuality” are situated, that is, the author understands that

[...] texts are constructed through other texts being articulated in particular ways, ways which depend upon and change with social circumstances. On the level of orders of discourse, relationships among and boundaries between discourse practices in an institution or the wider society are progressively shifted in ways which accord with directions of social change (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 9).

In the fourth and final condition, Fairclough (1992) presents the need for a critical method, arguing for the importance of unveiling the connections and causes implicated in the relations between discursive, social, and cultural change, which are not clear to spontaneous understanding, so that discursive change is observed struggling over the structuring of texts and orders of discourse.

Thus, it is possible to conceive the articulation happening between the internal elements of each moment, but also between the moments of practice, featuring a relative permanence of social action, that is, of hegemonic position. The concept of hegemony we refer to here corresponds to the Gramscian conception, which “[...] suggests articulatory process and struggle with specific changeable demands and limits” (RESENDE; RAMALHO, 2004, p. 197). CDA, as an emancipatory theoretical practice, embraces Gramsci's concept of hegemony, “[...] since it converges with the dialectical proposal of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to think of social practices as essentially contradictory and continuously changin” (RESENDE; RAMALHO, 2004, p.197).

Fairclough (1992) reminds us that hegemony “[...] is the power over society as a whole of one of the fundamental economically-defined classes in alliance with other social forces, but it is never achieved more than partially and temporarily, as an 'unstable equilibrium'” (p.122). Now, it is exactly the fact that hegemony is an unstable phenomenon, which requires constant attention from the hegemonic group, that points to its importance for critical discourse analysts. After all, one of the key purposes in these theorists' agenda is the contribution to the occurrence of a social transformation that enables the excluded classes to become discursively aware and, consequently, to fight for hegemony.

In this perspective, the author proposes a three-dimensional conception of discourse analysis that comprises three integrated dimensions, which are: the analysis

of the text, called *description*; the analysis of discursive practice and the analysis of social practice, constituents of the discourse, which are called *interpretation*. More specifically, the three-dimensional analysis comprises:

[...] text analysis involves four items, namely, vocabulary, which focuses on individual words; grammar, which deals with words combined into clauses and sentences; cohesion, which analyzes the connection between clauses and sentences; and text structure, which, in general, focuses on all the organizational aspects of texts.

Discourse practice addresses three dimensions: production, distribution, and consumption of the text. Drawing on the Interpretivist or microsociological tradition, the author considers discourse practice to be an active process of learning and production based on procedures consensually shared among people.

Meanwhile the central purpose of social practice analysis is to specify “[...] the nature of the social practice of which the discourse practice is a part, which is the basis for explaining why the discourse practice is as it is; and the effects of the discourse practice upon -the social practice” (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 237).

We consider educational policies to be a social practice and, therefore, a field of disputed power relations, and we point out that, for Fairclough's CDA (1992), the concepts of ideology and hegemony are two key categories, because in understanding discourse as a social practice, it is possible to assimilate its implication in the processes of both social reproduction and change, which is a crucial feature for studies on educational policy.

This conceptual articulation is fundamental to understanding that educational policy needs an in-depth investigation of the discursive and social practices put into action, in order to unveil the politico-social orientations and meanings, germinated in either its formulation or in its development, which allow us to explicit resistance positions in favor of a social change, in the perspective of a popular-democratic education.

In Fairclough's theory (1992), the concept of interdiscursivity, anchored in the conception formulated by the French discourse analysis theorist Michel Pêcheux<sup>8</sup>, and the concept of order of discourse, originally conceived by Michel Foucault<sup>9</sup>, assume a prominent place in the unveiling of the configuration of discursive practices and the relation between them. The author understands that discursive change takes place in a process of reconfiguration or mutation of the elements of the order of discourse, which, through a dynamic movement in the relationship between discursive practices, can favor both the reproduction of the social subject and their transformation and, still, extend its effect on the subjects and their identities, on social relations and also in the scope of knowledge and belief systems.

Seeking to elaborate the concept of interdiscursivity, Fairclough (1992) makes a distinction between intertextuality, defining it as a connection between texts, and interdiscursivity, which concerns relations between discursive formations or, more generally, between different types of discourse. The author also adds a distinction between manifest intertextuality (explicitly other specific texts are used), and interdiscursivity or constitutive intertextuality, emphasizing "[...] the heterogeneous constitution of texts out of elements (types of convention) of orders of discourse (interdiscursivity)" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 85).

Based on the elements discussed above, we try to meet our objectives of study, as presented below. Before that, however, it is important to discuss the policies that constitute the object of our analysis.

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<sup>8</sup> A Discursive Formation (DF) is "that which in a given ideological formation [...] determines '*what can and should be said*'" (PÊCHEUX, 1982, p.111 apud FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 31, original italics).

<sup>9</sup> "Foucault's descriptions highlight the mutual imbrication of the discursive and the non-discursive in the structural conditions for social practice. In this light, orders of discourse may be regarded as discursive facets of social orders whose internal articulation and re-articulation have the same nature" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1992, p. 71).

## Assessment policies and accountability in Basic Education: theoretical and conceptual aspects

According to Dias Sobrinho (2003), evaluation is an act of choosing and opting, and the execution of evaluative practices with a social dimension is very old<sup>10</sup>. As early as the modern era, with the processes of complexification of society, evaluation is linked to the interests of classification and selection, serving to select and classify workers in industry. Also according to the author, “[...] it is in education that the assessment has found its privileged position, not only as a pedagogical political practice, [...] but also as an important field of study (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2003, p. 15), assuming the traditional bias of regulation, selection and ordering, not only by occupying the pedagogical space, within the educational facilities, but also expanding itself to the domains of public administration, in which evaluation comes to resemble the concepts of selection, measurement and classification.

Further seeking to expand the meanings of evaluation, Fernandes (2010) gives us an important contribution when he approaches assessment as a social practice, arguing that

[...] assessment is a social practice that may contribute to characterize, understand, disseminate and assist in solving a wide variety of problems that affect contemporary societies, such as full access to education, health care services, distribution of resources and poverty. It is a realm that has been consolidating and asserting itself in an unquestionable way and that concerns the most diverse sectors of society (e.g., academics, politicians, decision-makers, and users of public services) (FERNANDES, 2010, p. 15).

According to Fernandes (2010), this approach highlights the assessment as oriented by principles grounded on rigor, utility, meaning and social relevance, understanding that “[...] as a social practice assessment cannot avoid social, political and ethical issues, as well as issues related to potential users, their use and the

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<sup>10</sup> "Just to give some examples: more than 2,000 years ago China already had selection exams for public services and ancient Greece practiced the *docimasia*, which consisted in a verification of the moral aptitudes of those who applied for public functions. [...] it is interesting to note that these evaluative procedures already carried a certain sense of public interest; formally not very elaborate, they were the precursors of the competitions that are widely practiced today" (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2003, p.14-15).

participation of stakeholders (e.g., the issues of voice, of meanings, of practices)” (FERNANDES, 2010, p. 16).

In the context of Basic Education, the assessment of student performance assumes a central position, which overshadows the other assessments: of institutions, teachers and even educational policies, often contradictory in their form and/or quite debatable consequences (AFONSO, 2014). The author then considers it essential “[...] that the connections and interactions between the different forms of evaluation” (p. 487) constitute an object of study. Afonso (2014) further argues that the motion towards a science of evaluation, as well as the upward trajectory of evaluation as a field, “[...] converges in the concern to reinforce the dignity of evaluation and the associated complexity of its theories and methodologies - in clear opposition to the deeply reductive and conservative neopositivist evaluative obsession prevailing today” (AFONSO, 2014, p. 488).

For our study, it is important to emphasize that the history and development of the evaluation field go hand in hand with social and political changes and the evolution of knowledge itself. Thus, in the 1970s, the States of more developed capitalist countries, such as the United States and England, strengthened the measures of control and supervision of public actions, a movement called by researchers the *Evaluative State*<sup>11</sup>, on the grounds of the lack of public resources for social policies and "the growing complexity of society" (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2004, p.708).

Assessment, then, assumes a privileged place in the processes of change in society (in the public sector, in the administration, in the way production is organized). In this context of the Evaluative State, it is striking that "[...] evaluations carried out by governments are almost exclusively external, summative, focused on results and on product comparisons, for the purpose of provoking competition and orienting the market, and are done ex-post" (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2004, p. 708), based on the objectivist/technocratic paradigm, valuing control and institutional competitiveness, to

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<sup>11</sup> "This phenomenon has become known as the "Evaluative State", according to an expression coined by Guy Neave, and it characterizes the strong presence of the State in controlling the expenditures and results of public institutions and agencies" (DIAS SOBRINHO, 2004, p. 708).



the detriment of solidarity and cooperation, ideologically binding itself to individualism and competitiveness. The author highlights that the objectivist paradigm, in this context of centrality of the evaluation, based on technicism, has as its primary purpose the accountability of "reliable" and "accurate" information, like the national, state and municipal assessment systems implemented in Brazil since the 1990s, and it also aims to provide tools to governments and to the market, in order to allow the control and guidance of educational policies and programs.

As we have already highlighted in the introduction section of this article, here in Brazil, educational assessment policies have been in the gaining importance since the late 1990s, with the development of the Saeb. This trend has been strengthened over the years with articulated policy strategies that, nationally, focus on forms of educational regulation through the expansion of evaluation processes and the adoption of synthetic indicators, such as Ideb.

We can take as an example of these political strategies the document of the National Education Plan 2014-2024, in which it is highlighted, for example, in Article 11, that the Saeb will be a source of information for the evaluation of the quality of basic education. It is also possible to find this explicit in one of its Goals: “**Goal 7:** to foster the quality of basic education in all stages and modalities, with improvement in school approvals and learning in order to achieve the following national averages for Ideb”.

As we can see, the external and large-scale evaluation and Ideb are highlighted in the national education policy. The focus is on achieving the previously determined indexes based on international parameters.

Therefore, Ideb has become the main quality indicator of Basic Education for the federal government, by combining the results of school performance, information gathered by *Prova Brasil* (Brazil Exam), and the results of school approval<sup>12</sup>, by Educacenso, carried out per student now, no longer per school.

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<sup>12</sup> The "Student Status" module is fundamental for the calculation of the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB). IDEB synthesizes two equally important concepts for the quality of education: the average performance of students in Portuguese and mathematics, and approval. While the performance averages are obtained by the Basic Education Assessment System (Saeb), the data on approval are calculated from the performance information declared in the "Student Status". For this, it is important

A variety of interpretations have been made in the face of this situation of using the results of *Prova Brasil* for the composition of Ideb, establishing connections with the requirement of enforcement. According to Bonamino and Sousa (2012), this approach is based on the definition of generations of evaluation and on soft and hard enforcement policies. Thus, in the authors' understanding,

[...] in terms of enforcement, however, Prova Brasil and the use of its results to compose IDEB integrate a soft enforcement policy, since they are limited to setting goals and disclosing the scores of students per school and school system, without attaching prizes or sanctions to these results, as it is typical of solid enforcement policies (HANUSHEK, 2004; HANUSHEK; RAYMOND, 2005 apud BONAMINO; SOUSA, 2012, p. 380).

In line with the national model of the evaluation system, Saeb, Brazilian states also adopt the implementation of their own evaluation systems for basic education, which then becomes an important object of study for several researchers in the field of education (BROOKE, 2006, 2008, 2013; Book; Cunha, 2011; FREITAS, 2012a, 2012b, 2013; BONAMINO; SOUSA, 2012; SCHNAIDER; NARDI, 2013; SILVA, 2016; LINDOSO; DOS SANTOS, 2019). In this scenario in which assessment has a central role regarding Basic Education, the concept of accountability has been repeatedly referenced in order to understand the policies being developed for this level of Brazilian education.

The extent of enforcement has assumed precedence in the debates on evaluation policies and accountability processes in Brazil, even though there is an understanding that the term also presupposes the concept of answerability. In fact, these educational policies have been called "Enforcement Policies", term conceived by Brooke (2008, p. 94)

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that schools use their administrative and academic records, such as registration forms, class diaries and school transcripts. [http://portal.inep.gov.br/artigo/-/asset\\_publisher/B4AQV9zFY7Bv/content/inep-inicia-coleta-de-dados-de-rendimento-e-movimento-do-censo-escolar-2017/21206](http://portal.inep.gov.br/artigo/-/asset_publisher/B4AQV9zFY7Bv/content/inep-inicia-coleta-de-dados-de-rendimento-e-movimento-do-censo-escolar-2017/21206) .

[...] as an attempt to improve school results by creating consequences, either material or symbolic, for the school or individual teachers, according to student performance as measured by state or municipal assessment procedures.

From this perspective, Freitas (2011) has strongly emphasized the close relationship between enforcement and privatization in the management of public education. According to the author, the decision for the scientific objectivity of the evaluations conceals the most diverse political and economic interests of the governmental and business spheres, undermining the performance control of education professionals and educational units of the public education systems. The author also understands that meritocracy is one of the central elements of this process, in alliance with the scrutiny of public opinion, with the purpose of privatizing public schools (FREITAS, 2011).

It is worth explaining here the concept of accountability, and we resort to Campos (1990), who understands that this concept, conventionally translated to Portuguese as answerability, has several meanings. Thus, the author presents two dimensions of accountability, the subjective and the objective. The former concerns the responsibility embedded in the very subject, while the latter requires an external demand, imbued with the character of compulsion. The author adds:

[...] if this accountability is not felt subjectively (by the individual before themselves) by the holder of the public functions, it should be demanded "from the outside in"; it should be compelled by the possibility of the attribution of rewards and punishments to the one who recognizes themselves as responsible (CAMPOS, 1990, p. 33).

Campos' (1990) concern about the concept of accountability brings the term closer to the issue of citizens' rights, democracy, bureaucratic control, but also to transparency and autonomy of public agents and institutions.

Pinho and Sacramento (2009) share the idea that there is not a single definition of the term accountability in Portuguese, alluding to the two-dimensionality (answerability/enforcement) of the concept, understanding that "[...] accountability encloses the responsibility, the obligation and answerability of who occupies a position in accounting for their acts according to the parameters of the law, with the

possibility of onus involved, which would be the penalty for non-compliance with this directive" (PINHO; SACRAMENTO, 2009, p. 1,348).

According to Afonso (2009), the term accountability, based on Schedler's notes (1999), combines in its structure three substantive dimensions: information, justification, and imposition or sanction (enforcement). The author argues that the "[...] answerability may be the pillar that supports or condenses the first two: the right to request information and to demand justifications" (AFONSO, 2009, p. 59). Afonso also discusses educational accountability and says that it comprises three pillars: answerability, enforcement and evaluation.

It is also important to highlight that, in Schedler's view (1999 apud AFONSO, 2009), the answerability, imbued with an informative dimension and an argumentative dimension, can, "[...] in a certain sense, be conceived as a communicative or discursive activity because it presupposes a critical dialogue relationship and the possibility of developing an in-depth public debate" (AFONSO, 2009, p. 59).

Afonso (2009, 2012) considers evaluation to be the first pillar of accountability, but he draws attention to the different models and theories of evaluation, of heterogeneous and often contradictory character. Thus, the author, in defense of a progressive and alternative conceptualization of accountability, suggests, as an example to be applied, the deliberative democratic evaluation, alluding to the approach of Howe and Ashcraft (2005, apud AFONSO, 2012). He refers to the principles of inclusion, dialogue and deliberation, stating the complexity and interconnection of the three principles: "[...] as Howe and Ashcraft (2005) remind us, as it is difficult to grasp where inclusion ends and dialogue begins, it is also difficult to grasp where critical dialogue ends and deliberation begins" (AFONSO, 2012, p. 478).

Regarding the answerability pillar, Afonso (2012) highlights information and justification as important elements in the perspective of the alternative and democratic conceptualization of accountability, as previously stated, claiming as worthy the work of critical theories related to information "[...] processes and argumentation practices" (AFONSO, 2012, p.479), while he also draws attention to the "interfaces with the principles of deliberative democratic evaluation, particularly regarding 'critical

dialogue'" (idem) and also these information and justification processes. On the other hand, Afonso (2012) points out that

[...] in much of the discourse influenced by this politico-ideological bias [neoliberal conservatism], the meaning of the word accountability often indicates a hierarchical-bureaucratic or technocratic and managerialist form of answerability which, at least implicitly, contains and emphasizes negative and stigmatizing consequences or imputations, which not infrequently embody authoritarian forms of holding institutions, organizations and individuals accountable. (AFONSO, 2012, p. 472)

Finally, enforcement, as the third pillar of the accountability configuration, assumes the "[...] negative and culpable connotation in discursive terms and social representation" (AFONSO, 2012, p. 480). Hence, as the author says, "[...] enforcement is most easily reduced to the threat or negative attribution of blame about certain actions and their alleged outcomes" (idem).

In a more extended and democratic theoretical-conceptual perspective, Afonso (2010) provides an argument putting into interaction the three pillars (answerability, evaluation, enforcement) implied in the accountability process. In his own words:

[...] in a democratic society, to be accountable one must evaluate in a reasoned manner and as objectively as possible; and one is accountable in an effort to ensure transparency and the right to information regarding the pursuit of policies, guidelines, processes, and practices. And if for some reason the voluntary assumption of possible personal, political or institutional responsibilities is neither expected nor appropriate, or if, as a result of the answerability, awards or sanctions or other forms of enforcement of institutions, organizations, or individuals are to take place, one should still take into consideration, depending on the specifics of the cases, rigorous and prudent evaluation from the technical-methodological point of view (having as reference not only previously defined criteria, targets and standards, but also widely participated and formative processes), and also bearing in mind the cultural, ethical and legal setting that provides for democratic procedures and protects fundamental rights (AFONSO, 2010, p. 153).

Thus, the author takes out the concept of accountability from a neoliberal and conservative context that is currently imposed, suggesting that we think of democratic and alternative processes, contemplating the three pillars (evaluation, answerability, and enforcement) integrated and based on participatory and formative principles, processes, and practices, guided by transparency and the right to information.

In this perspective, in the next section, we present an example of critical discourse analysis having as object of analysis the evaluation policies for basic education and the accountability mechanisms in the states of the Northeast Region.

### **Discursive elements in circulation regarding assessment policies and accountability in Basic Education in states of the Northeastern Region**

From this perspective of critical discourse analysis, the assessment policies and accountability in the scope of basic education in states of the Northeast Region should be taken as discursive structures or articulatory processes. These structures and processes shape and constitute social relations, in a process of articulation between the determinations of this specific discursive event, that is, a particular social ordering of the relations between the various methods of creating meaning in the educational sector.

As we have already mentioned, the state governments followed the same system as the federal government, implementing their own evaluation systems, with the use of external and large-scale evaluation tools, which was no different in the Northeast Region.

The following table presents a time mapping of the implementation of evaluation systems in the Northeastern states, indicating the year of their creation - Alagoas, Bahia, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, Rio Grande do Norte, and Sergipe. The time frame considered was from 1999 to 2018. The information was collected from the CAED Evaluation Portal and also through the websites of the education secretariats of each state.



**Table 1** – Basic Education Assessment Systems of the States of the Northeastern Region, per implementation period

ESTADO	IMPLEMENTATION YEAR	ONGOING PERIOD	EVALUATION SYSTEMS
Ceará (CE)	1999	From 2007 to ...	System for Permanent Assessment of Basic Education (SPAECE)
Bahia (BA)	1999	From 1999 to 2004	Project for External Assessment of the State of Bahia
	2008	From 2008 to 2013	Bahia Education Assessment System (SABE) Assessment of Literacy in the State of Bahia (AVALIE ALFA) State of Bahia High School Assessment (AVALIE ENSINO MÉDIO)
Pernambuco (PE)	2000	From 2007 to ...	Pernambuco's Educational Assessment System (SAEPE)
Alagoas (AL)	2001	From 2001 to 2005	System of Educational Assessment of Alagoas (SAVEAL)
	2012	From 2012 to ...	System of Learning Assessment of the State Education System of Alagoas (AREAL)
Sergipe (SE)	2004	From 2004 to 2006	Basic Education Assessment Exam of the State of Sergipe (EXAEB/SE)
Piauí (PI)	2011	From 2011 to ...	System of Educational Assessment of Piauí (SAEPI)
Paraíba (PB)	2012	From 2012 to ...	System for the Assessment of Education of Paraíba (AVALIANDO IDEPB)
Maranhão (MA)	2015	2015	State Assessment System (AVALIA MARANHÃO)
	2016	From 2016 to ...	MAIS IDEB Plan
Rio Grande do Norte (RN)	2016	From 2016 to ...	School Learning Assessment Program (RN APRENDE)

Source: Prepared by the authors bases on the Assessment Portal (*Portal Avaliação*).

As we may gather from the table, all the Northeastern states have an assessment system for their educational systems. We can verify that the states of Ceará and Bahia were the pioneers in implementing their own evaluation systems. Following these two states, Pernambuco and Alagoas implemented their own evaluation systems in the early 2000s.

The states of PE and CE have a longer experience with Basic Education assessment, with over twenty years, and, for over a decade, they have been continuously conducting large-scale external assessments, since 2007. The other states (PI, PB, MA, RN) adopted their own evaluation systems starting in the 2010s.

It is noteworthy that, as of 2008, the assessments began to be conducted annually, under the guidance of CAED, seeking to engage "[...] a strong structure of logistics, research, publication and dissemination of the results of these assessments throughout the state" (VALENÇA, 2013, p. 25).

Our analysis was conducted on documents referring to the assessment systems cited above in Table 1, concerning states with assessment systems in operation in the year of 2018, which were: Ceará, Pernambuco, Alagoas, Piauí, Paraíba, Maranhão, and Rio Grande do Norte. The data collection of official documents took place through the websites of the state education secretariats and/or state governments (such as official diaries). However, due to difficulties in collecting official documents because of the poor access to the state secretariats' and governments' websites, we resorted to Google searches and academic papers with studies on the assessment systems in question.

The states of Ceará, Pernambuco and Paraíba have a larger quantity of normative instruments referring to assessment policies, which include performance index regulation, financial incentives (to both professionals and students) and educational and school management. In the other states (AL - MA - PI - RN) we found fewer normative documents, with the state of RN being the one which we could only find the law on the approval of the State Education Plan. The states of Pernambuco and Ceará stand out for the large volume of documents and information available, being the states that present a longer continuity in the development of their actions.

In the textual analysis, we demarcate the vocabulary, which is especially concerned with isolated words. In the research, the words assessment and accountability were chosen, as well as accountability's two most recurrent meanings: enforcement and answerability, in an attempt to understand the discourses on assessment and accountability in education.

In the analysis of discursive practice, we emphasize the property of the text known as manifest intertextuality and interdiscursivity (also called constitutive intertextuality), considering the diversity of conceptions and visions about the assessment policies and accountability found in the analyzed texts, which allows us to highlight the interconnections between assessment, answerability and enforcement,

dimensions/pillars of the concept of accountability based on the discursive elements that constitute the policies of assessment of basic education implemented in the Northeastern states under analysis.

One of the first elements that we sought to analyze was the creation of state indexes, along the lines of the national Ideb, and we observed a recurrence in the states of Alagoas, Ceará, Maranhão, Paraíba, Pernambuco, Piauí, and Rio Grande do Norte, which, having as their focus the goal of improving the Ideb rates, assume the discourse of considering assessment as the diagnosis and monitoring of student and school performance. In addition to implementing their own systems of external and large-scale assessment, they created a state indicator, similar to the Ideb model, articulating the large-scale external assessment with state indicators, as it is shown in the table below:

**Table 2** - Basic Education Development Indexes and External and Large Scale Assessment Systems of States in the Northeastern Region

State	Basic Education Development Index	Assessment Systems
AL	Alagoas Educational Development Index (IDEAL)	AREAL
CE	School Performance Index - Literacy (IDE-ALFA) School Performance Index - 5th grade (IDE-5) School Performance Index- 9th grade (IDE-9)	SPAECE
MA	State Educational Development Index (IEDE)	AVALIA MARANHÃO
PB	Paraíba's Educational Development Index (IDEPB)	AVALIANDO IDEPB
PE	Pernambuco's Educational Development Index (IDEPE)	SAEPE
PI	Piauí's Educational Development Index (IDEPI)	SAEPI
RN	Student Proficiency Index	RN APRENDE

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on: <http://www.portalavaliacao.caedufjf.net/>, official documents, and the websites of the state education secretariats.

By observing Table 2, one can notice a pattern in the denomination of the performance indicators "Education Development Index," similar to the state assessment systems, under the guidance of CAED. A single indicator is established per state, except for the state of Ceará, which established one indicator per grade, in relation to primary education (IDE-ALFA; IDE-5; IDE-9), indicating a direct relationship with the school, the "School Performance Index.

The speeches on the reasons for the creation of state indexes, besides the justification of temporality, due to the fact that state assessments are annual, while the Ideb is biannual, are close to the version that also served to justify the implementation of their own evaluation systems, as "objective", "measurable" information.

This discourse of technical rationality is evident in the text excerpt from the website<sup>13</sup> of the Secretary of Education of the State of Maranhão, which states the importance of IEDE, the state indicator, referring to "solid statistics", as well as relating the IEDE to the definition of goals due to the "answerability" to national assessments and goals:

[...] the idea is that the proficiency indicators of this assessment, together with school performance and management efficiency indicators, will make it possible to generate the State Educational Development Index (IEDE) that will measure, with **solid statistical** references, aspects of management and teaching and learning in schools, as well as **establish goals to be achieved** that may allow analytical alignment with national indicators in education, such as the data from **Prova Brasil and IDEB** (SEDUC-MA, 2017).

International experiences and agendas, such as PISA<sup>14</sup>, have validated decision-making based on "solid statistics", as stated in the text above, based on the use of information from the assessment of student performance on Basic Education policies in sub-national instances in Brazil. The international agenda is an important element of the intertextuality that refers to the external and large-scale assessment.

This "technical" and "neutral" discourse effectively defines the normative legislation of state governments and state education secretariats for Basic Education policies in the Northeast Region, focusing on their own evaluation systems in order to achieve the indexes determined by the IDEB. Freitas et al. (2007) challenge the use of the assessment as a tool to improve the quality of education impregnated by liberal meritocracy, considering that if “[...] the assessment is placed at its service (of liberal meritocracy), then it will be limited to the measurement of merit and the concealing of

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.educacao.ma.gov.br/mais-ideb/>.

<sup>14</sup> The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international comparative study conducted every three years by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), in which students from Brazil participate.

social inequality in the form of 'neutral' indicators such as the Basic Education Development Index (IDEB)” (FREITAS et al., 2007, p. 971).

For example, in Article 3 of SEDUC Ordinance No. 4948 of December 18th, 2015, which establishes the Education Development Index of Alagoas (IDEAL), in points I and III, IDEAL is defined as a parameter for the calculation of quality goals, which are "set" by each school. The language used includes words like "calculation" and "[goals] set", which elucidate a heterogeneity of meanings in the text and which are not part of the vocabulary of the education field, indicating interference from other areas of knowledge vying for power in the discourse on education.

Art. 3º The IDEAL subsidizes:

I - **the calculation of quality targets** set for each school unit;

III- the teaching quality targets **are set by the institutions** [Schools] and **oriented and monitored by the Secretariat** (ALAGOAS, 2015).

The government of Ceará, by adopting a managerial approach, has prioritized standardization, requiring precise information with the support of mathematical instruments. This is shown in Law no. 13.875, of February 07th, 2007, when presenting the Management Model of the Executive Power of the state of Ceará, which announces the execution of deep changes in the structure of its administration, conceived in article VI of the Law as

[...] management by Results as a citizen-oriented administration, focused notably in the end-use areas, aiming at **optimal standards of efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness**, continuously and systematically **evaluated and rearranged** according to social needs, providing concrete mechanisms for **management information** (CEARÁ, 2007).

It is worth mentioning that the institution of the Executive Power Management Model, in the government of Ceará, oriented to all sectors of state structure, including education, as of 2007, has been given priority in the internal clash with other policies, as the main government policy in the educational area. In a context of significant cuts motivated by neoliberal principles, the implementation of such model is carried out through the determination of rigid goals and permanent monitoring, using assessment as an information tool for management purposes.

The government of Pernambuco, following this same perspective of neoliberal cuts, leaves its marks in the document entitled "United for Pernambuco in times of governance: achievements and challenges", displayed on the website of the Secretariat for Planning and Management (SEPLAG-PE), presented as the management model of Pernambuco<sup>15</sup>, and considered:

[...] put in place in March 2008 and in operation ever since, the All for Pernambuco Model brought to the Public Management of the State a set of **new routines and practices** that, having been **established and internalized**, have been **rigorously fulfilled** since then by the entire public machine, raising the **efficiency, efficacy and effectiveness** of government action and, as a result, bringing results for Society (PERNAMBUCO, 2014).

Thus, it is evident that the emphasis is on the discourse of "efficiency", "efficacy" and "effectiveness", in line with the neoliberal discourse, committed to raising productivity rates, which is very close to the control that occurs in the systemic world of the economics, as the expense of a humanizing and critical education.

It is precisely this managerial perspective that guides the mechanisms of control and regulation of education professionals, affecting school management and the domains of pedagogical practice. The government of Paraíba, through Provisional Measure No. 259, of May 12th, 2017, in alliance with this neoliberal model, institutes the Program for Modernization and Efficiency of Learning Management in Paraíba and, in its sole paragraph, presents as its objective

[...] **to optimize the routine procedures performed by teachers** of the state education system, with the purpose of favoring the improvement of the process of managing teaching and student learning, also granting the teachers that participate in **the Program a monthly merit bonus pay**. (PARAÍBA, 2017).

We can see that the term "to optimize" is linked to the managerial discourse aiming to achieve a higher production, imposing on teachers new forms of organization and a greater supervision of their work, including the creation of a merit bonus. As Freitas (2012a) says, it would appear that auditing processes of the school and of

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.seplag.pe.gov.br/web/tppe/docmg-documentacao-do-modelo-de-gestao#&panel1-1>.



teachers are being installed, by affecting exactly "the routine procedures performed by teachers of the state education system," as we can see in the excerpt of the text above.

As for the text on the website<sup>16</sup> of the Secretariat of Education of the State of Maranhão, when presenting the State Assessment System of the State of Maranhão, *Avalia Maranhão*, created in 2015, a more democratic perspective is announced regarding the use of information generated by the assessment, with praise directed at the development of diagnosis to support pedagogical practices and the development of educational policies:

[...] *Avalia Maranhão* will enable the teaching units to provide diagnostic elements on student learning in the two areas, in order to support the adoption of public policies in education by the education secretariat and its regional units and in the teaching units, develop pedagogical and management actions to ensure the improvement of teaching and learning (MARANHÃO, 2015).

However, in 2016, with the implementation of the MAIS IDEB Plan, the Secretariat of Education of the State of Maranhão adopts the discourse, as the other states, of reaching the Ideb goals, establishing a close connection with the quality of education, when it declares the goal "[...] of giving Maranhão's education a benchmark level of quality, improving student performance and learning, which are fundamental indicators for the increase in the Ideb"<sup>17</sup>.

It is our understanding that the processes that articulate assessment and accountability reach the schools in full of controlling actions over the work of teachers, who are persuaded by means of a bonus given to those who meet the pre-established goals set by the state Secretariat of Education, instituting a discourse that interconnects assessment, answerability, and enforcement, placing teachers in a state of professional tension and culpability depending on whether or not they meet the specified goals. Considering this scenario, it seems to us that there is little room for a broader concept of accountability, which requires, in addition to providing information to the school

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.educacao.ma.gov.br/avalia-maranhao/>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.educacao.ma.gov.br/?s=MAIS+IDEB&submit=Search>.

community and society in general, the providence of dialogue channels and processes of information and justification.

We also verify this same trend when we observe in Decree No. 14.624 of October 31st, 2011, of the government of the State of Piauí, in its article 1, which establishes the System of Educational Assessment of the State of Piauí (SAEPI), the statement that this system “[...] will have as its objective the diagnosis of school performance of students in the 5th grade and 9th grade of elementary school, and 3rd grade of high school in state public schools” (PIAUI, 2011).

Thus, in possession of this "diagnosis," the State Secretariat of Education emphasizes results-based management and the constant process of evaluation to which it is subjected, as we have repeatedly observed in other states, in a perspective of monitoring the program's actions and results, as an internal answerability within the secretariat of education, and an external answerability to the federal government, considering the increasing of the states' rankings based on the biannual disclosure of IDEB.

Rio Grande do Norte is the latest state to implement its own system of external and large-scale assessment, RN Aprende, guided by CAED, in 2017, integrating the Integrated System of Institutional Monitoring and Assessment (SIMAIS)<sup>18</sup>, which already has the term "monitoring" in its name. According to the secretary of education,

[...] SIMAIS is a set of integrated actions, all aimed at the **production and management of educational indicators** that must support the formulation and implementation of public policies for the development of state education, and promote the **increase of the performance standard** of the public education system. (RIO GRANDE DO NORTE, 2017, our griffins)

Here, in this excerpt from the RN system, we also find discursive excerpts that relate to the managerial perspective of organizing basic education policy in the northeastern states studied. Hence the explicitness of the objective that aims “[...] to

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<http://seec.rn.gov.br/Conteudo.asp?TRAN=ITEM&TARG=145682&ACT=&PAGE=&PARM=&LBL=Materia>.

raise the performance standard of the system”, which, as a rule, means increasing the Ideb scores.

The textual elements of the discourse of the state governments, such as expressions like "solid statistics", "calculation of quality goals", "set goals", "monitoring", "optimal standards", "efficiency", "effectiveness", "effectiveness", "managerial information", "new routines and practices", "rigorously enforced", "optimizing routine procedures performed by teachers", "production and management of educational indicators", as well as "raising the performance standard" appear repeatedly and, together, constitute a hegemony of the managerial discourse, in the market logic, keeping away from a more democratic concept of accountability.

It is possible to observe that the pieces of information generated by the assessment are used as mechanisms of monitoring and controlling educational policies according to a performance standard outlined by the Ideb, which establishes a direct answerability by the federated entities in order to align with the dictates of international competitiveness that have been propagated globally through various strategies, such as the wide dissemination of PISA.

Thus, in this panorama of discursive signals along the paths or shortcuts of discursive practices in the documents that disclose the development of policies on Basic Education in the analyzed states of the Northeast Region, we emphasize the conceptions and meanings of assessment and accountability. It is clear that assessment takes a central place in these policies, being linked to processes of answerability that are developed institutionally, through the bureaucracy of state governments, in particular the secretariats of education and education systems, stressing the power of monitoring mechanisms, especially in the states of Pernambuco and Ceará.

The intertextuality reveals a strategy to change the discourse on education, aiming to promote an idea that the improvement of the educational system, more specifically, the quality of students' learning, occurs through the system of large-scale assessments. Thus, the discourse takes on a political tone, which gives it persuasive power by promoting the idea that it is the assessments that will parameterize a competent management, so as to engage educational managers in the universe in which

the design and methodology of large-scale assessments prevail, i.e., diagnosis and monitoring according to the management by results.

## Conclusion

Taking the creation of Ideb as a reference, based on the results published in 2007, by state, municipality, and school, we observe an expansion of the already existing assessment systems (in Ceará and Pernambuco) and the implementation of state assessment systems in the Northeast Region. The nine Northeastern states have created their own large-scale assessment systems, but the states of Bahia and Sergipe have not followed up on them, indicating a central role of assessments in the formulation and configuration of educational policy, especially in Basic Education.

In this scenario, it is worth mentioning the role of the Center for Public Policies and Educational Assessment (CAED), an institution linked to public universities, which provides direct assistance to six Northeastern states (AL - CE - PB - PE - PI - RN), with the exception of the state of Maranhão, in the structuring and implementation of state assessments of Basic Education, based on the Saeb model.

The interdiscursivity surrounding the interaction between the pillars of the concept of accountability (assessment, answerability and enforcement) becomes more complex because the conventional meaning of answerability is historically related to the reporting of public spending, with its own legislation and specific language for its exposure, lacking a re-signification of these elements today, given the development of new computer technologies, and the expanding democratic assumptions.

Hence, there is an interposition of meanings between the meanings of answerability and enforcement when one considers the traditional hierarchical-bureaucratic relations in place in public agencies and the processes of constructing new parameters for answerability and, also, for the responsibility of the public employee. It gets even more complex when the discursive elements point to a dispute between the assumptions of democratic management and those of business management.

With business management maintaining its hegemony, the change tends to be more radical, especially in the case of Brazilian education, which, in recent decades, has pursued the status of a democratic and inclusive education.

Based on the focus on the results, one may assume assessment and monitoring are privileged processes in the discursive practice, which becomes explicit in the texts of the documents of the Northeastern states under analysis. The meanings of enforcement are mixed with meanings, on one hand, of a negative nature (pressure, guilt) and, on the other hand, with meanings of the reform or empowerment of deontological principles of the teaching professional.

In the states of Pernambuco and Ceará, the accountability models under development put into circulation an interdiscursivity with traces of democratic management in dispute with management by results, which expresses a hegemony for changes in the direction of the implementation of the principles of the New Public Management (NGP) and of governance, in accordance with the managerialist and meritocratic ideology, involving the entire state political machine, including the secretariat of education, in a kind of "institutional accountability" (ROCHA, 2011), by denying public management and incorporating business management, seen as the most effective.

The option for the analytical work, with emphasis on intertextuality and interdiscursivity, allowed us to capture the presence of discursive formations and orders of discourse that are close to a hegemonic social practice (which is also managerialist and meritocratic, with focus on assessment). And, customarily of dynamic reality, the resulting practices can contribute to the restructuring of the existing power relations in the field of education, generating social change.

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