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EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP AND CURRICULAR CONTEXTUALIZATION IN GUINEA-BISSAU

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Abstract: Citizenship is an emerging issue that has gained significant political and social centrality, especially in contexts where the low standard of living of populations is a socially worrying issue with evident repercussions on the most vulnerable strata, in particular, women and children. Although this situation crosses several social sectors, it is particularly visible in the area of education, where the effects are felt in a more intense and prolonged way. In Guinea-Bissau, this is an observable reality today, despite the initiatives carried out in the education sector, such as promoting access to school, extending compulsory education to nine years and improving the national school network. Thus, the relevance of Education for Citizenship (EC) is understood, especially if it focuses on dimensions such as learning to be, to be, to relate, to participate and to decide, thus contributing to the formation of knowledgeable, responsible citizens. and interventions in individual, community and social terms. This text presents some reflections on the importance of the curriculum in CE, in the context of the educational reform underway in Guinea-Bissau. In our opinion, the CE curriculum must be organized around three structuring axes – the individual, the relational and the community one –, essential for the development of capacities, competences and attitude that prepare young people for an effective integration in society.

Keywords: Education for Citizenship, Curriculum Contextualization, Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

The intense and rapid political, scientific, technological and economic changes that have permeated contemporary society have generated new challenges whose answers, more complex and demanding, demand a different attitude from citizens, only possible to achieve in a dimension that reconciles the individual with the community. Furthermore,

the fact that the challenges we face today have heightened the need for each context to be structured around axes considered fundamental in any democratic society, such as, for example, culture, citizenship, equity, rights human rights, sustainability, justice and peace.

It is in this sense that education and, in particular, the school curriculum can make a difference, especially if they are conceived [and implemented] as essential nutrients for basic education for all citizens, based on principles and values that favor inclusion and promote both access to culture and the overcoming of social inequalities, as well as the development of skills and competences necessary to continue learning throughout life (Lourenço, Lima & Sasaki, 2020).

In this order of ideas, the school, as an artefact that stimulates sharing, mutual assistance and learning, is configured as a space and a time conducive to the achievement of the enumerated purposes. Even recognizing, with Formosinho and Machado (2011), that the democratization of the school fell short of expectations, restricting itself to guaranteeing only equal access, this fact cannot lessen the opportunity to adopt educational policies and practices that create conditions for reorganize the school and make it a true mainstay of curricular diversification and pedagogical differentiation, after all, essential elements for an effective equality of success.

This situation is particularly sensitive in the Global South Countries, as is the case of Guinea-Bissau, where human development, the fight against poverty, the country's growth in economic terms, the improvement of living conditions and the development of priority areas these are aspirations that have yet to be achieved and that continue to preoccupy decision-makers both domestically and internationally.

It was with the aim of reflecting on the

aforementioned aspects that we organized the text that follows. After a first approach to the concepts of citizenship and cultural citizenship, we reflect on the importance of education and curriculum in their implementation. At a later time, we approach the specific case of Guinea-Bissau, dedicating ourselves to understanding the main transformations to be imprinted in the educational sector through the ongoing curriculum reform. In the end, we outline some considerations that intend to stimulate new reflections on a topic that remains current and relevant.

THE CONCEPT OF CITIZENSHIP

The fact that in certain regions of the world citizenship is an emerging issue that has achieved effective political and social centrality seems not to be controversial, especially in contexts where the low standard of living of the populations is a matter of concern with evident repercussions on the most vulnerable strata, in particular, women and children. Although this situation is transversal to several social quadrants, as shown by the development indicators published in 2013, 2014 and 2015, in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Reports, it is particularly visible in the area of education, where effects are felt in a more intense and prolonged way.

But what do we mean when we talk about citizenship?

Citizenship is now recognized as an attribute of any citizen, which involves attitudes and behaviors related to the enjoyment of rights and the obligation to fulfill civil, political and social duties established in the Basic Law (Constitution) of a country.

However, the concept of citizenship has evolved over time, since, historically, it was not extended to all citizens. Only men or landowners were eligible to be considered citizens (UNESCO, 2015). In fact, if we analyze

the evolution of the concept in a diachronic perspective, we find that

citizenship began by being, in a certain sense, much more a product of exclusion than of inclusion, since its attribution and the conquest of the different rights referenced to it, in each historical moment, not only did not occur simultaneously, but also as it presupposed, in many cases, the maintenance of discrimination based on gender, age, race, social status or class, education, property, religion¹.

Nowadays, the situation is quite different. During much of the last century, an intensive set of changes and transformations gradually contributed to a more inclusive understanding of citizenship, moving from a more restricted approach to a broader understanding of the concept itself (UNESCO, 2015). More current perspectives on the concept of citizenship limit it, in several countries, to a register of legal equality of all citizens who live in common national times and spaces.

Hence the importance that has been recognized to Education for Citizenship, since it aims to train people to make decisions and assume individual, community and social responsibilities. This training finds in the school a privileged place, since it “constitutes an important context for the learning of the exercise of citizenship”, mainly because in it flow a large part of the “transversal concerns to society” that, more or less explicitly, constitute structuring axes of the concept of citizenship itself. We can mention, as an example, human rights (Alves & Prado, 2021), the culture of peace, gender equality, curricular justice, environmental preservation, among others. Basically, a set of aspects that demand the formation of individuals capable of claiming their rights while scrupulously fulfilling their duties, in dialogue and respect for others, regardless of their social, economic or

¹ See Recommendation No. 1/2012, of 24 January, from the Ministry of Education and Science and the National Council of Education.

religious origin.

CURRICULUM AND CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

In this segment of the text we start by clarifying what we are referring to when we talk about curriculum, culture and cultural citizenship. From there, we try to characterize the culture that today permeates most contemporary societies and relate it to the curriculum that is developed in the school context, in order to create conditions for an experience, in each context, of an effective cultural citizenship.

Starting with the notion of curriculum, it is important to remember that, regardless of whether it is a polysemic concept, an attribute that justifies the profusion of definitions that have been engendered over time, the curriculum is a political and cultural artifact. It is in this sense that Grundy (1998, p. 5) reiterates that the curriculum cannot be seen as “an abstract concept” whose existence can be disconnected from human experience”, considering, therefore, that it is a cultural construction and “a way of organizing a series of educational practices”. Hence Pacheco (2003) warns of the need for education, understood as a space for the participation of each individual as a curricular actor, “to legitimize the curricular culture of students’ daily lives, their knowledge, their contexts and their social problems”. Basically, a desideratum that can only be achieved if the curriculum is no longer seen as a plan prepared by specialists for teachers to apply at school, but is understood as a cultural artifact and an educational proposal, that is, a training project that, associating the plan of intentions with the terrain of practices, it conveys a certain social and cultural background.

Regarding the notion of culture, for reasons of space, we stick to the notion worked by

Laraia (2001, p. 14)², that considers culture as a complex construction that “includes knowledge, art, beliefs, law, morals, customs and all habits and skills acquired by human beings not only in the family, but also by being part of a society”. of which he is a member”. Although it is a notion that is not limited to a strictly biological dimension, since it requires learning and the transmission of knowledge, it is generalist and restrictive when compared

with definitions by other authors, who conceive of culture as “a system of innate conceptions through which individuals communicate and develop their knowledge, imposing meaning on the world and seeking answers to make it understandable”, although in certain circumstances it can be viewed as “a behavior control mechanism” (Geertz, 1973). In short, a notion of culture that positions it at a confluence of ideas “conditioned to specific behaviors/standards of certain social groups instructed to their members or imitated by them” (Comprido, 2013, p. 2). A final note to mention that, as it can function as a control mechanism (Geertz, 1973), culture is one of the structuring axes of both cultural policy and political culture itself (Chaúí, 2006), and is therefore decisive in the inclusion or exclusion of individuals in social terms.

Moving on to the third concept and taking into account that citizenship refers to the belonging of an individual to a group/society and to the rights and duties – social, political and civil – that he has, the Agency for the Knowledge Society (UMIC) considers that cultural citizenship is the right to knowledge and cultural representation of that individual (UMIC, 2013)³ – rights related to cultural production, linguistic diversity, diversity of manifestations, among others.

Starting from the concepts discussed, it is now important to mention two aspects that question education and the school and,

² The author works with this notion from the book of Edward Tylor – *Primitive Culture* – published in 1871.

³ UMIC – Agency for the Knowledge Society, IP”. Accessed on 20 November, available on the website: <http://www.unic.pt/>

consequently, the curriculum that is developed there.

Firstly, the fact that culture is not being considered in all its fullness, especially because certain cultural projects, managed by companies to the detriment of the State, limit its field of action, limiting it to the domain of the arts because they are easier to get a common sense notion of culture, because they become more visible in society and because they generate a faster return (Chauí, 2006).

At second place, the fact that nowadays, we are part of what Lipovetsky e Serroy (2010) identify as World Culture to refer to the emergence of a model of society (hypermodern world) that emerged at the end of the 20th century, guided by a new system of values and based on a new notion of culture. A notion of culture that has changed and expanded significantly (tourism, art, fashion, urbanism, advertising, among others, are now part of this culture), has transcended borders (fruit of the globalizing torrent that has been devastating us in recent years), diluted dichotomies, faced the ideas of hierarchy, authority and wealth, revalued the economic sector (already in full expansion) and pulverized and intensified the supply of commercial and symbolic goods (books, music, fashion, design, technological innovations, gastronomy...).

Basically, a cultural change that is significantly transforming the current world and that allows Lipovetsky (2016) to guarantee that we are moving towards a civilization of the light, when he states that:

We live in an era of the triumph of lightness, both in the literal and metaphorical sense of the term. It is an everyday culture of lightness mediated by the mass media that govern us, the universe of consumption that does not fail to exalt hedonistic and playful references. Through objects, leisure, television, advertising, an environment of permanent entertainment and incitement to the “enjoyment” of immediate and easy

pleasures is spread. Replacing coercion with seduction, duty with hedonism, solemnity with humor, the consumerist universe tends to present itself as a universe relieved of all ideological gravity, of all thickness of meaning. The light, understood in the first or second sense, has become one of the great mirrors in which our time is reflected. (p. 14)

As it can easily be seen, this cultural transformation is reflected in the school, in particular in the curriculum that is developed there, forcing school actors to reposition themselves and to find ways to respond to the new social and cultural challenges they face. This is an important challenge, given that, due to various contingencies, people continue in many cases to favor a more instrumental and more utilitarian dimension of education and curriculum to the detriment of the affirmation of values inherent to human development and the construction of full citizenship, namely a true cultural citizenship.

Now, since the curriculum is a social and cultural artifact, it is at this level that changes can be initiated that allow the aforementioned aspects to be implemented, and it is up to the teachers, as professionals of the curriculum, to assume another role in this process. Thus, it is essential to adopt a concept of curriculum that is substantially different from what has prevailed until now, which implies the “passage from a technical curriculum, supposedly aseptic, because it is hermetically closed and therefore decontextualized, to a curriculum that becomes aware of criticism of its territory as a subsystem of a broader system where multiple pressures of a political, economic, social and cultural nature play” (Sousa, 2004, p. IV). Basically, a curriculum that results from a participatory construction and an assumed sharing of powers and responsibilities (Morgado, 2002), allowing the various actors in the educational process to feel co-responsible for the design and

implementation of this common training project.

THE SPECIFIC CASE OF GUINEA-BISSAU

The Republic of Guinea-Bissau, an independent country since 1974, is among the poorest countries with the greatest external dependence (Salgado, 2013). Indeed, according to the 2015 Human Development Report, Guinea-Bissau occupied, in 2015, the 178th position in the ranking of the 188 nations present in the Human Development Index and its components (UNDP, 2015).

The population is mostly young, living mostly in rural areas, with an annual growth of around 3%, and in the age group from 7 to 17 years, this growth has been around 39% in recent years (Barreto, 2012). According to the Ministry of National Education (MEN), access to school, namely to basic education, is not yet universal, with a large dropout rate and huge regional and gender disparities in terms of passing rates (MEN, 2010).

In report No. 15/194 of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the political instability experienced in the country since its independence, where there were 18 coups, coup attempts and alleged military coups (IMF, 2015) and the economic and financial difficulties that have plagued the Guinean population and the marked lack of qualified training of the teaching staff have contributed to perpetuating some educational problems, namely in terms of school performance, early dropout and gender inequalities (Barbosa et al., 2003).

Guinea-Bissau's education system, which is heavily dependent on external aid, still does not have the conditions to create positive expectations regarding the evolution of the school situation. However, for Barreto (2012), statistical data indicate an evolution in access to basic and secondary education levels and in

recent years there has been a

an enormous effort of intervention, translated into a plurality of diagnostic studies, in the elaboration of norms and in the accomplishment of tasks that point to the reform of the educational system in the sense of a greater adaptation to the Guinean context and of the scientific and pedagogical updating. (p. 2)

This is an observable reality, despite the initiatives carried out in the education sector, such as the promotion of access to school, the extension of compulsory education and the improvement of the national school network (Lopes, 2014). The current Guinean government has started an ambitious reform agenda to face the country's development challenges. To this end, it adopted a Strategic Plan aimed at "consolidating previous progress, boosting socio-economic development in 2014-2018, and launching Guinea-Bissau into a virtuous circle of progress by 2025" (IMF, 2015, p. 6).

The MEN published a Guiding Document (DO) for the Curricular Reform of Basic Education – RECEB, the result of the work of collecting, consulting and analyzing existing information in documents prepared by the National Institute for the Development of Education (INDE). This document aims to guide the methodology to be adopted in the implementation of the Guinean curriculum reform (MEN, 2015). In light of the LBSE, the general structure of basic education presented in the DO is divided into three sequential cycles of: four years (two phases); two years (one phase); and, three years (one phase).

The MEN justifies the commitment to education as one of the priority sectors in Guinea-Bissau, since, in addition to two other justifications (relationship with natural, social and cultural potential; levels of human development), there is the fact that there is a "fragile citizenship". As a consequence of these premises, the Guinean government's

measures in terms of public education policies will contemplate the emancipatory training of citizens; the valorization of human resources; and, the promotion of equal access and opportunities for all (MEN, 2014).

Thus, the relevance of Education for Citizenship (EC) is understood, especially if it focuses on dimensions such as learning to be, to be, to relate, to participate and to decide, thus contributing to the formation of knowledgeable, responsible citizens. and intervening in individual, relational and community terms. In this undertaking, the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) will certainly contribute to facilitating the development of these goals.

It is believed today that Basic Education is a structuring axis of human development, and must therefore provide students with the acquisition of essential knowledge and the development of relevant skills for their individual, relational and community training. For this purpose, in the curricular structure of this teaching cycle there are several curricular components, including Training for Life, which includes a new disciplinary area, called Education for Citizenship (1st and 2nd Cycles) and Education for Life (3rd Cycle).

The subject of Education for Citizenship/ Education for Life must, therefore, be developed on the basis of a program that, without neglecting the assumptions set out in the Basic Law of the Educational System of Guinea-Bissau, is structured around three main axes – the individual; the relational; and, the community – and is dimensioned through values, attitudes and behaviors that contribute to the construction and consolidation of a modern and inclusive society, only possible through the exploration of different dimensions such as the valorization of Human Rights, the culture of peace, gender equality, education for development, environmental preservation, and health education, media

education, curricular justice, among others (Morgado & Guimarães, 2020).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Citizenship is today a key issue in countries where populations have low standards of living, particularly in the most vulnerable social strata. Guinea-Bissau thus emerges as a country in which this concept deserves centrality in teaching programs in compulsory education. The curriculum constitutes a relevant instrument for the promotion of social inclusion and cultural citizenship. It is therefore intended that teaching encourages critical thinking, communicative skills and the ability to live in community, highlighting the individual, relational and community dimensions (Guimarães, Morgado & Pacheco, 2021). Basically, operationalize the emerging relations between curriculum and cultural citizenship and foster a set of aspects inherent to a democratic, plural and inclusive society that the current Guinean government aims to build.

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