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# The Role of Social Policies in the Education of Children and Poor Mothers in Salvador, Bahia

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#### ABSTRACT

This article explores the narratives of women beneficiaries of different social policies in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, analyzing mothers discourses, attitudes and practices in the relationship to their children and, in particular, their commitment to supporting school tasks and their participation in school activities. Additionally, and especially, it looks at their daily work to instill the value of education, as well as practices and commitments between generations of mothers and children with the aim of preparing children with the aim of preparing the new generations to reach a higher level of human development, greater autonomy and increased wellbeing in their future trajectories. The qualitative methodology was applied: sixteen interviews with beneficiary mothers of social policies in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, and results were explored with the method of Speech Analysis. Results show that mothers from poor families who receive the benefits of social policies are intergenerationally involved with their commitments. Mothers were even returning to schools, both for personal fulfillment and to give their children an example of the high value that they give to education.

Key words: families, social policies, poverty, generations, mothers and children.

### THEORETICAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

According to the perspective of social structure and the role of social agents, Giddens (1988) considers that social reality integrates and plays an important role in the action of social actors, through socio-cultural mechanisms of integration and reproduction of the reality in daily lives and, at the same time, in the exercising their ability to choose between different options and practices that can reproduce existing regularities, structure new regularities or break pre-established trends. The behavioral diversity of individual actors reproduces, modifies, or destroys the structural properties of communities (Giddens, 1988: 19). Therefore, it is relevant to know the norms established in context and the social practices - individual and/or collective - that the social actors develop in a determined time and ordered space.

The analysis of the behavior of agents in an institutional context also refers to the neoinstitutional perspective, which assumes that institutions are created to provide security against risks (North, 1990).

This article analyzes the interconnections between family members – mother and children, particularly the role of the mother in the process of socialization that promotes education for communities and households living in poverty, deepening the study of the generational relationship between mother and child, full of values, customs and beliefs that are transmitted and inherited during their early lives (Salles & Tuirán, 1998), as well as in family processes that are important for human development and the expectations of social mobility of children.



Given this environment of the relationship between families and the educational processes of children in a context of poverty, characterized by the difficulties of access to resources and institutions, this research asks how poor mothers value their children's education and how they account for the activities of the school, the planning of the calendar, the importance of their support in the tasks of the children, and their participation in the construction of events and institutional documents in the school.

In a context of poverty, the relationship between families and the educational process of children is influenced by difficulties of access to resources and institutions, as well as in family limits to support children education.

This research asks how poor mothers values their children's education and how they support school activities, how they plan and follow school calendar and support in the tasks of the children at home and the commitment they have in participating in events and meetings at school.

### The relationship between family and school

Changes in society, economy and politics are evident in the systems present in the lives of individuals and directly reflect the influence of values, attitudes and norms in the network of family relationships.

Marques (2001) points out three objectives when considering socio-cultural differences in the acquisition of world development: a) to stimulate and promote the level of physical, emotional, moral, cognitive and personality development,; b) the development of citizen awareness and the capacity to intervene in the social sphere; c) to promote continuous learning in its various forms and the principles for inclusion in the labor market. For the author, it is necessary to promote activities related to effective motor, social and cognitive integration with life's path.

Schools also reflect societal, political and pedagogical scenarios and reproduce norms, values, conflicts and differences. Education is a social process framed within a certain conception of the world, with the purpose of achieving by the law of education, in accordance with the dominant ideas in a given society, whilst also reflecting changes and transformations derived from this process, conceptions and relations among social agents, conditions that promote agreements and reconciliations, conflicts and discontent. Schools update cultural knowledge in order to understand its role in the development. (Gadotti 1993, p.312)

In Latin America, since the first decade of the twentieth century, a weak institutional and legal framework defined the right to education as an obligation of the State. until the 1950s when there was a real expansion of the coverage of primary education, but it excluded the most vulnerable groups of the population - the poorest, the indigenous, Afro-descendants, and residents of rural localities. In Brazil, at the end of the military dictatorship, the Federal Constitution of 1988 finally legitimized the right to education of all Brazilian citizens, establishing that the state had a formal obligation to guarantee education to all Brazilians, in order to promote human development and equity. The concepts of vulnerability and social risks were extended beyond income poverty, to include subjective aspects present in the living conditions of the citizens, such as the loss of social, family and identity ties, thus valuing social relationships and solidarity networks as relational goods capable of impacting well-being. The right to education is a part of the set of established social rights,

"Education is a right of everyone and the duty of the State and the family will be promoted and encouraged by the cooperation of society, seeking the full development of the person, his preparation for the exercise of citizenship and his qualification for work. " (Federal Constitution 1988, article 205)

In addition to the Federal Constitution of 1988, there are two laws that regulate and supplement the guarantee of the right to education; the Brazilian legal framework offers several tools that guarantee the rights of children and their protection. In force since 1990, the Childhood and Adolescence Statute is considered a milestone in the protection of children and is based on the principle of complete protection, reinforcing the idea of "absolute priority" in the Constitution. The Statute for Children and Adolescents includes the fundamental rights of children and adolescents, as well as sanctions for non-compliance, and defines the State agencies that must provide assistance and the characterization of crimes against children. The most important law of Brazil that refers to education was approved in December 1996, and is popularly known as the 'Darcy Ribeiro' Law, since Ribeiro was an important educator and Brazilian politician who was one of the main creators of this law. The LDB consists of 92 articles that deal with the most diverse topics of Brazilian education, from preschool to higher education. Together, these mechanisms open the doors of fundamental public schooling for all Brazilians, since it establishes that no child, young or adult can stop studying for lack of space in schools, thus forcing the State to provide universal access.

#### **Poverty and Education**

The theoretical perspective of human development throws multidimensional perspectives capable of embracing the readings of human rights in a sphere of situations favorable to the growth and full exercise of human intellectual capacities, such as educational skills. In situations of poverty, income shortages, and low access to institutions, it is a priority to neutralize these restrictions and provide greater access to public education, health, safety, and security services. Therefore, the possibilities of exercising citizenship in a more participatory, egalitarian and just society requires an adequate understanding of the roles of individuals in different democratic spaces in order to overcome the vulnerabilities that accompany poverty (Sen, 1989, PNHD, 2010; UNDP, 2010). Poverty and inequality, in particular unequal opportunities and freedoms, diminish the capacities of people and affect their economic development. Sen (2010) affirms that inequalities in human development require dialogue between social sectors in order to achieve the desired educational results in the promotion of skills, freedoms and opportunities; that is a) the capacity to generate autonomy, b) freedom to make decisions, and c) the opportunity to achieve the goals that human beings aspire to.

In Brazil, low access to institutions results in low-income families, a poor educational level and little involvement in formal education (Nogueira, ABREU, 2004, PATTO, 1999)

### Social policies in Brazil

Between 2003 and 2014, increases in formal employment, compensatory increases in the minimum salary, and the massification of social policies such as conditioned cash transfers (CCTs) promoting health services and school attendance of poor children and adolescents has allowed Brazil to achieve the universalization of access to a basic education.

The *Bolsa Familia* Program is a direct income transfer program that benefits families living in poverty. Children and young people under the age of 18 should be enrolled in school and with a minimum attendance of 85% for students aged 6-15 and 75% for students aged 16 and 17. The program aims to secure income and promote immediate poverty alleviation, improving access to basic social rights in the areas of education, health and social assistance. In addition to complementary actions and programs aimed at the development of families, the National Program for Access to Technical Education and Employment (Pronatec) provides both

technical and vocational training for people in situations of social vulnerability. The prerequisites for participation in Pronatec are that a student must be over 16 years of age and be enrolled in the Unique Pattern of beneficiaries of social assistance (CadÚnico). Any member of the family who is enrolled in CadÚnico can participate and there is no limit to the number of members per family, since the program promotes those who have left school, so that they can return to the educational system to develop a professional qualification and increase their chances of insertion into the labor market. It also aims to provide vocational training for young people who are attending secondary level education. The Program of Continuous Benefit ensures the monthly transfer of the value of one minimum wage to all poor people over 65 years old and disabled people of any age, whether their disability be defined as physical, mental, intellectual or sensorial.

Despite this widespread availability of social policies and their broad coverage, poor communities are historically contexts of scarce availability of resources and institutions, and it is necessary to work in networks of cooperation (Wolf-Branigin, LeRoy, and Miller, 2001; Jacobs, 1984; Robertson and Wier, 1998; Wier and Robertson, 1998).

### METHODOLOGY

In this paper we analyze the characteristics of poor families in one of the poorest states in Brazil, the State of Bahia, and the vulnerabilities related to poverty levels, in particular that of children's education in the environment of peripheral neighborhoods of the metropolitan region of the state capital Salvador, in contrast to the conditions of the poorest families, with an emphasis on conversations with mothers who are beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Familia* Program and discovering how it helps with the education of their children.

I conducted sixteen in-depth interviews with mothers who are beneficiaries of the *Bolsa Familia* Program and other social policies in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, Bahia, using the method of Speech Analysis.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# Mother's perception on family and social policies

The profile of the interviewees is that of sixteen women, fourteen of whom receive the *Bolsa Família* Program transfer and two who receive the Continuous Benefit. One of the women is under 25 years old, the vast majority are between 26 and 45 years old and two are over 46 years old. Five of the women were teenage mothers, and one of them reports that her whole routine and responsibilities have changed radically since then, without complaining that her child has had a permanent disability from birth.

"Everything changed, changed, changed that I slept late, was the mother's daughter, and then I went to see what I had done and had to pay for the consequences of what I had done, I had to take care of my husband, take care of the house. None of these I did before, washing dishes, everything was my mother, but I went to make a son "(Beneficiary BPC)

Most women describe themselves as "brown" (*mestizo*), but almost all assume that the majority of the population in their neighborhood is black. One of them contradicts herself when asked about the color of her children, after having declared them "brown":

"There are two types, there are several types (of "brown"), right? Of colors, today you bear a son and he is white, one is whiter than another, one is darker than another, I feel clear, dark, or brown, and I am proud to be like this, thank God. I have nothing to complain about ... " (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia A) Most of the interviewees did not complete basic education (eight years in Brazil), even in the metropolitan region of Salvador, an urban area where there is greater access to school. One of them was displeased during the interview, having dropped out of school, and said that this makes it difficult for her to have a relationship with her son, because she does not have enough knowledge to help him in school tasks.

"Because of the difficulty, that the person cannot, does not manage to have a job, that is now making it difficult to help the children, because they are already in the fourth year of school, then I do not know anymore to teach them, and the father does not have time, that's why (they do not do well). (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia B)

The two main arguments used by these mothers for not having completed their studies were the need to work or care for small children. In some cases both arguments coincide:

"Because it was very difficult, because I had to, already tired, really, I had to walk behind the children. There were times when I had time to go to school, but sometimes I could not. I also had to do cleaning in family houses, and I could not go to school, I could not stay at home all day, I had to walk behind a laundry, to do cleaning, some work "(Beneficiary of Bolsa Familia A1)

This complex and multidimensional reality gives the family a central role in education and the development process, but it must also recognize that the generational changes in knowledge levels are represented too, and that the conflicts that may arise between families and expectations generated in the school about their responsiveness and support, are mainly in the contexts of poverty and educational disadvantages of these families. The centrality of the relationship between the family and the school should be better analyzed by teachers to find ways to support families, and recognize their limitations.

The individual and family educational process is a process in which the adult generations contribute to the personal development and socialization of the younger generations. The educational model is based on a set of beliefs, values, myths and goals; and the responsibility of each family member in education depends on the degree of recognition and acceptance of these values by each person. The mother's comment above shows that this responsibility is individual, but it has generational contributions, past, present and future in the actions and results of the children.

Beyond the need to work, the search for personal fulfillment is a desire present in individual subjectivity that transcends family relationships and spreads to all societies; autonomy is a strong feature of the development process of individuals, families and communities today.

Some mothers interviewed, motivated by the needs and attitudes of the children, express the desire to return to study.

The relationship between family and school would be better analyzed, in order to allow teachers to find more effective ways to support families and to recognize their limitations in this collaboration. The individual and family educational process involves adult generations in families contributing to the personal development and socialization of the younger generations. The educational model is based on a set of beliefs, values, myths and goals; and the responsibility of each family member in education depends on the degree of recognition and acceptance of these values by each person. This mother's speech shows that this responsibility is individual, but it has generational contributions, past, present and future in the actions and results of the children. Beyond the need to work, the search for personal fulfillment is a desire present in individual subjectivity that transcends family relationships

and spreads to all societies; autonomy is a strong feature of the development process of individuals, families and communities today. Some mothers interviewed, motivated by the needs and attitudes of the children, express the desire to return to study.

"I'm thinking about it, now I'm thinking about it, because there are colleges. In my case, my oldest daughter always says: do it mother! So, I have to start thinking about it now, if I could I would have done it a long time ago, but because of some things, right, now it's time to start thinking seriously. " (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia D)

The motivation to support children in their studies, coupled with personal and professional achievement, has led some of the beneficiaries of social policies to return to school and for others to think of it as a viable and desirable option.

### The value of education for mothers who benefit from social policies

The generational study is an important basis for the analysis of the disputes, ruptures and continuities that occur between the values, discourses and practices of one generation and the next, since generational research admits "to study carefully and deeply the intensity and the ways in which these relations link and, at the same time, distance the generations" (Elder, 1988; Hareven, 1978). The study of transmissions and the family allows the identification of the context in which families reproduce education between generations and how they make it a valuable tool for affirmation, empowerment and self-regulation among family members, which is necessary for human development in the individual and collective spheres. The generational study associated with that of the family sees education in its proper place in each historical moment and how it is valued and reinvested in by the families throughout the life of the analyzed subject. The strong presence of women in family educational practices allowed the study to focus on the position of women in child care and their support for school tasks and activities. This family support is important for human development and the expectations of social mobility of children compared to that of their mothers, given this environment of the relationship between families and the educational process of children in a context of poverty, characterized by the difficulties of intergenerational access to institutions, and developing knowledge and abilities.

This research asks how mothers value their children's education and how they account for the activities of the school, the planning of the calendar, the importance of their support in the tasks of the children and their participation in the construction of events and institutional documents in the school. Many of the mothers interviewed are satisfied with the school attended by their children. They demonstrate a positive opinion, often based on an idealized view, but other times based on frequent and regular school visits.

"It's the foundation, right? In order to achieve a life, in this case, a profession, it is important but education actually comes from home, the school is responsible for training." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia E)

In Salvador, one of the neighborhood schools was attended by many current students' mothers, which gives them a greater proximity and facilitates their participation in the educational process and maintaining contact with the teachers.

"As I have studied here, I was a student here, so my children can attend the same school in which I studied. - I talk a lot about school, that's right. It is from this school here, so they are also close to the house, that makes it very easy for me and for them too, for me it is optimal. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia F)

Mothers demonstrate a willingness to participate in school events, even when they have time constraints, which is the case for those who work.

"Whenever I can I'm in the meetings. For example, if you call me for something like that, for a meeting, then I go. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia G)"

"I cannot, because the work does not stop." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia H)

But usually these women do not have someone to replace them while participating in school events.

"No, then I go after, the next day, and then I justify myself and try to know in fact what was the subject of the meeting, because in that case I could not attend." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia I)

In cases where there are teenage brothers, they help to find information in school: "My eldest daughter, my girl and I are going to the meetings. Sometimes she goes, she is informed, and I go later, if that is the case. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia I)

The activities developed by the school to promote community participation are highly valued by mothers.

" I took it to a fair in the neighborhood, well, the parents there helping, that whole thing to collect things, for donation ... "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia K)"

"The school promotes more and more things for children, as I say, in the project to get them off the street, I understand, a training course, professionalization for work, those things ... "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia L)"

"On Saturdays, they always try to bring children together with the mothers in the school, honestly, to know, in your case, that things can be improved in school. There is the volunteer who is in school, always helping in something." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia J)

Women reinforce that this collaboration between school and family is necessary.

"It is important, because one is more connected with what is happening in the school, and the school is more connected with those who are the parents of the students, that would help a lot in relation to many things, would help a lot." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia M)

"Because then you know what is happening, right? What is needed, both at school and in the community, right? One must know what is happening with the other, because when you do not know, you stay outside, sometimes you come to school complaining and do not know the reality, what is happening. But when you get involved, you end up knowing the problem situation. . "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia N)

#### Education as human development and as a project of social mobility

Educators, sociologists and psychologists are unanimous in accepting the idea that we must investigate more thoroughly the factors that contribute to create the conditions of academic achievement and, consequently, discover how they can contribute to the understanding of school failure, particularly among young children (Dazzani and Faria, 2009).

On the one hand, the entry of women into the labor market since the 1960s has had important effects on family relationships, redefining roles and responsibilities, reorganizing the daily lives of families and their structure as a social institution. On the other hand, it reduces the time that can be spent in supporting the children in school tasks. However, most poor women

do not have paid work, as well as having very low levels of education, and face difficulties in supporting their children with schoolwork from the earliest years of primary education.

In the Brazilian political and educational context of the period of re-democratization, the school would become an important educational and socializing agency, complementing the work done by the families. For this reason, it has become a matter of the utmost importance to the systematic completion and retention of students in school and, as a result, to the role of the family in this process. In this context, the family came to be considered as an important element in the educational process. The academic performance of the students came to be considered as the result of the parents 'performance' (quality of parents' participation in education and in school, involvement, control and expectations and commitment to educational action, educational practices, attribution of meaning to the school, etc.). (Dazzani and Faria, 2009). Over the past 15 years, the implementation of conditional cash transfer programs has sought to ensure continuity of the child in school as well as improved school performance.

In Brazil, particularly in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador, analyzed in this study, the Bolsa Familia Program and a set of social policies have generated very high expectations in the mothers of children who have just emerged from extreme poverty. The results indicate that they not only comply satisfactorily with conditions, they consider them a great opportunity to guarantee a better future for their children, generating very high expectations for the future careers of their children.

The women interviewed report spontaneously that they have a social mobility project for their children, and that they are willing to invest in it.

# Perceptions of mother's role and practices to support children's education

Strategies to support children in school tasks are an ongoing concern for those mothers whose average level of education is lower than their adolescent children, relying on the support of other members of the family (where they exist), or on teachers' instructions to help children to do the searches on the internet, for example. It should be mentioned that some beneficiaries of social programs used the benefits to buy computers or even to pay for the internet as a school research tool for children.

"If they ask a question about something, for example, what happened yesterday. Yesterday the teacher gave history lessons to my daughter and told her to search the internet. She was not understanding the class about the Indians, about how the natives live, the food and all that, then the teacher told her to look for the topic on a site, and she would get the summary on that site. Then we went along with her, I talked a little, she talked a little, then she managed to conclude the summary for the teacher. . "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia L)"

"Of course I do, I encourage and I consider it important. Because it's the key, right? It is what will open the doors of employment, to a good stability in life. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia M)

"Because I think so, without studies we are nothing, we need to study to be able to update in everything, in life. Planning the future and their life trajectories as adults." (Beneficiary Bolsa Familia N)

All the mothers who were asked about whether they encourage their children in the studies and think about their future responded positively "Of course! Planning the future, planning the family, planning the issues of life, with their children, then in all I influence, I tell you that if you have a good study will always want to be there, studying, a good profession, then their standard of living will be much better .. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia J)"

"I teach them to save for their future. I do this: when they earn some money, we are going to assume that he earns some money from an uncle or someone, whenever an uncle or aunt comes to visit, he gives them a little money, so I always tell them not to spend all at once, I teach them to learn to save, for example, if they go to school, I tell them, if you have that money in your hand, do not spend everything in school, no, because you have to think about it next day ... if they want to buy something, we are saving about 6 months, a year, and if you also collect a few coins, then you are going to get us to buy what you want so much, let's assume, a cell phone, a thing like that, important for them, then if you save, you will achieve to have it, to buy what you want, then I believe that it is already a beginning of the incentive for you to think your life in the future. Even if she finishes her third year of high school, she is always doing another course, she is always doing something, indeed, improving the quality of her study. "(Beneficiary Bolsa Familia O)

"I encourage, because without studies, you have nothing, right? They have to study to be someone, I myself, I regret so much that I did not study, I studied until high school and I tell you everything I already suffered, which I already spent working in other houses as a domestic employee, working in a restaurant, working in this thing ... today I miss it, I feel like doing what I did not do before, now is to return, to return to my studies. (Beneficiary of Bolsa Familia P).

"I encourage. Every day I tell them: 'From within those two illiterates, someone must come out who is something in life. I want you to be doctors, so that tomorrow you will not let me go hungry'. Because you raise your children so that afterwards they will take care of you, right? Because then one becomes as a child, right? Because it was like that with my mother. I took care of my mother until the last breath. So I encourage them. (Beneficiary of Bolsa Familia Q)

The main expectation of these mothers is that their children use education as the main mechanism to obtain a better quality of life than they themselves achieved. All of them showed that the conditionality of social policies to promote their children's attendance and approval at school was only an additional incentive, but it is not the only determinant for their children to attend school, because they use all the resources for that.

"They added a lot, because before they no longer lacked school, but then there was more demand for frequency to maintain the benefit." (Beneficiary of Bolsa Familia A)

However, there are institutional limits to these efforts, mainly linked to the work of schools, which are worse in the peripheral neighborhoods, such as poor working conditions for teachers, as well as difficulties in getting closer to the real conditions of mothers to involve them in school processes. Unfortunately, just the willpower and practices of these mothers in order for their children to continue successfully in their studies is not enough to guarantee a quality education; it is necessary to complement policies and mothers' efforts with actions within the same educational system so that this is done in full, and to guarantee the necessary subsidies for these children and adolescents to receive continuous and qualified training, to achieve family and children's goals of personal and professional fulfillment in the future.

### CONCLUSIONS

Education should be analyzed as part of a complex social game and the academic performance of students should be considered not only as a result of many aspects of the school context and socio-historical context, but also as an important reference point for the integration of social policies within families, with special attention to mothers' education. They did not have the opportunity to access school when they were girls, and now seek greater opportunities, beyond paid work, to increase their own human development, in line with and in collaboration with the development of their children.

According to Martins (2008), the Brazilian school faces a system of social marginalization and difficult dialogue within the cultural diversity of society. So what is meant by better performance is actually one of the processes of adaptation for students and families, a dominant logical and content procedure, that not always, or rather, very rarely, actually means a process of meaningful learning for students ".

Weaker performance of poor children and mothers prevails in this context. Poor women interviewed in the Metropolitan Region of Salvador show that, for their part, there are significant opportunities for improvement in their children's performances, which not only depend on their mothers' participation in school activities, but also in the tasks to develop children's abilities. Mothers are even returning to school to support their children and for their own professional realization.

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