

What does the Pandemic Teach us?

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In Brazil, the underreporting of cases of Coronavirus is high due to the lack of mass testing. Social isolation, in turn, has only been partially fulfilled, and there are serious political conflicts between the federal government and state governments over health policies to face the pandemic, resulting in an unprecedented political crisis in the recent past. Thus, the balance of the Ministry of Health of May 27, 2020, records 25,598 deaths and 411,821 confirmed cases. This number ranks Brazil, at that time, in the second place in number of confirmed cases of the disease worldwide, following only the United States. Currently, Brazil has the most worrying tendency in record of deaths by Covid-19 as to the number of people that the new Coronavirus kills per day. Even so, for now, there is a reasonable consensus that schools and universities are institutions that should avoid classroom activities.

With the pandemic, there was a dispute between narratives, also expressing a dispute over the power of science to define truths. In this case, the Brazilian pandemic scenario is similar¹ as what Donald Trump has been doing in the USA with his notion of alternative facts. The Bolsonaro government, its followers and its robots for mass dissemination of WhatsApp messages and Twitter posts disseminate contradictory or even false data, the famous "fake news"², whose publications undermine the disease caused by the Coronavirus or use a single isolated case as evidence for positions to be defended: "chloroquine is a drug that can save everyone," "social isolation does not reduce contagion," "there are not so many deaths, the numbers are invented and empty coffins are buried," "China created the virus in laboratory to take over the world." We mention these affirmations only to show what is being disseminated about the new Coronavirus. The denial of prescriptions of epidemiologists and infectologists goes as far as to threaten the lives of the president's own followers, who are exposed to contagion, and in some cases die from the disease. Nothing, however, seems to diminish the strength with which many defend their theses (about 30% of the population, according to recent opinion polls).

In this scenario, educational purposes are also disputed. How does education – and schools and the curriculum – change with the pandemic? How can it contribute to the understanding of the situation in which we live? And, above all, how can education help to

¹ It is not possible to detail here the approximations and differences between political processes that mark the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and of Donald Trump in the USA. I focus only on how both rely on an anti-science discourse or defend an "alternative science" (contrary to the supposedly left-wing scientific principles).

² Further studies should discuss the phenomenon of "fake news." However, I would like to point out that the common statement that "if they are news, they shouldn't be fake" projects an assumption of factual truth-fake "versus" true news, referenced in an ideal of press neutrality. Without aiming to trivialize a phenomenon that transcends the usual limits of a journalism committed to certain political views, I believe that fake news requires an analysis of how they lead us to consider power relations in the production of truth in politics. Farkas & Schou (2018: 300) begin this discussion by stating "how 'fake news' has gradually become a floating signifier used within different discourses to criticize, delegitimize and exclude opposing political projects."

avoid the repetition of moments like this one we are experiencing? As it has been widely discussed, education – and schools and the curriculum – cannot solve problems that go beyond pedagogical issues. The position of expecting serious social, political-economic and environmental problems to be solved by educational processes is not only a naive position, but also an ineffective one.

This, however, does not mean that the educational space – in person or online – cannot contribute to the debate on these issues. Particularly considering the curriculum, the field of our studies, much can be developed so that not only the Covid-19 pandemic, but the serious environmental and health problems that we live in the world today are solved. I want to emphasize, however, that such solutions will not be merely technical, nor will they depend exclusively on informing the population, or spreading scientific knowledge. It is, above all, an ethical-political issue, which, as such, needs to include the discussion of how human beings relate to life, disease, health and care for the other.

If the pandemic is teaching us something, it is that neither the future can be predicted nor only the sciences can make us question denial discourse and defend life. We also need political work and, with that, the education.

Notes

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References

Farkas, Johan & Schou, Jannick (2018). Fake News as a Floating Signifier: Hegemony, Antagonism and the Politics of Falsehood, *Javnost - The Public*, 25:3, 298-314, DOI: 10.1080/13183222.2018.1463047