



## Criticism to “Measurements” in Education in the Light of the Theory of Capacities: Meritocracy that Strengthens Inequality\*

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze how the idea of meritocracy in education ends up reinforcing inequality as it opts for limited evaluation criteria. It is an exploratory research with a hermeneutic and theoretical-bibliographic character anchored in the writings of Nussbaum (2012; 2014; 2015), Bachelard (1996), Dubet (2004), among other authors. It seeks to answer the following question: why educational evaluation processes based on measurements and meritocracy end up justifying inequality and promoting social injustice? The results show that evaluations based on meritocratic criteria are not capable of measuring all spheres of life, becoming limited in proposing what people are capable of being and doing. Bearing in mind the need to create a democratic and fair school, it is concluded that the theory of capabilities is a means of seeking the individuality and skills of subjects, adding to the apprehension of knowledge and self-reflection.

### KEYWORDS

Meritocracy. Inequality. Capacity theory. Assessment.

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## Crítica as “Medições” em Educação à Luz da Teoria das Capacidades: A Meritocracia que Reforça a Desigualdade

### RESUMO

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar como a ideia de meritocracia na educação acaba reforçando a desigualdade na medida em que opta por critérios de avaliação limitados. Trata-se de uma pesquisa exploratória de caráter hermenêutico e teórico-bibliográfico ancorado nos escritos de Nussbaum (2012; 2014; 2015), Bachelard (1996), Dubet (2004), entre outros autores. Busca responder à seguinte questão: por que processos avaliativos educacionais baseados em medições e meritocracia acabam justificando a desigualdade e promovendo a injustiça social? Os resultados expõem que as avaliações baseadas em critérios meritocráticos não são capazes de medir todas as esferas da vida, tornando-se limitados ao propor o que as pessoas são capazes de ser e fazer. Tendo em vista a necessidade de se criar uma escola democrática e justa, conclui-se que a teoria das capacidades são um meio de buscar a individualidade e habilidades dos sujeitos, agregando na apreensão de conhecimento e na auto reflexão.

### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Meritocracia. Desigualdade. Teoria das capacidades. Avaliação.

## Crítica a las “Medidas” en Educación a la Luz de la Teoría de Las Capacidades: Meritocracia que Fortalece La Desigualdad

### RESUMEN

Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar cómo la idea de meritocracia en la educación acaba reforzando la desigualdad al optar por criterios de evaluación limitados. Se trata de una investigación exploratoria de carácter hermenéutico y teórico-bibliográfico anclado en los escritos de Nussbaum (2012; 2014; 2015), Bachelard (1996), Dubet (2004), entre otros autores. Se busca dar respuesta a la siguiente pregunta: ¿por qué los procesos de evaluación educativa basados en mediciones y meritocracia terminan justificando la desigualdad y promoviendo la injusticia social? Los resultados muestran que las evaluaciones basadas en criterios meritocráticos no son capaces de medir todos los ámbitos de la vida, limitándose a proponer lo que las personas son capaces de ser y hacer. Teniendo en cuenta la necesidad de crear una escuela democrática y justa, se concluye que la teoría de las capacidades es un medio para buscar la individualidad y habilidades de los sujetos, sumando a la aprehensión del conocimiento y la autorreflexión.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Meritocracia. Desigualdad. Teoría de la capacidad. Evaluación.

## Introduction

Several Brazilian governments and certain business sectors of education have proliferated the idea that it is not possible to improve the quality of education without “measuring” student performance. Thus, large-scale evaluation programs have been adopted. Tests, exams and assessments are the most frequent means of measuring student performance in school. Likewise, educational assessments measure the quality of teaching against standardized assessment criteria. The fact is that such standardized assessments do not cover all spheres of life, such as social, economic and cultural inequality. Thus, a set of doubts arises regarding the fact that the evaluation is limited to the use of a single numerical measure as a reliable method, because “before thinking about the object of its measurement, a scientific spirit conceives its measurement method” (CARDOSO, 2013, p. 25). Thus, one of the standardized criteria on which evaluations are based is meritocracy.

Constantly, the idea of meritocracy is associated with individual performance, and examples of people who have had professional success or have risen financially on their own merit are used. This idea has spread in various narratives in society, a context in which the criterion of meritocracy as a means of “justice” is increasingly valued. In education, the idea of meritocracy also becomes a criterion for school performance, so that the educational and professional success of students who had privileged access to quality education becomes a rule, and certain contingencies that reinforce inequality are disregarded. . The fact is that certain students who have precarious access to education, when they achieve success, represent an exception. This idea reinforces the notion that, in order to achieve success, one must “deserve it”, when in reality the opportunities are different among students, especially in the public network, where, even with all their efforts, students are constrained by their unequal living conditions.

Regarding the idea of a democratic school, Dubet (2004, p. 541) mentions meritocracy as a basic principle of a fair school, insofar as “meritocratic equality of opportunity presupposes equality of access”. By highlighting the importance of access, the author refers to equal opportunities, which should be available to all. However, how can the school be a fair institution if there is competition between students who have different personalities and live in unequal conditions? Thus, “ensuring that all students participate in the competition, supported by a vaunted equality of opportunity, does not translate into justice” (MARCATO; CONTI, 2017, p. 67). This indicates that having the same opportunity to participate does not imply having equality of performance, as the opportunity to access school education is not enough. There are many other variables that need to be considered, such as: good conditions of study and housing, family support and encouragement, adequate food, etc. The rhetoric of meritocracy disregards such variables and assumes that everyone has an opportunity; therefore, those who succeed must be rewarded deservedly. In the words of Dubet (2004, p. 542), “school is free, exams are objective and everyone can try their luck”. This means that, from a formal point of view, students can aim for excellence. However, Dubet himself (2004, p. 541) warns: “meritocratic equality of opportunity presupposes equality of access”, which

does not mean that this “school became fairer because it reduced the difference in terms of favorable results between the categories”. social”; it just “allowed all students to enter the same competition”.

At this point, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of the main works mentioned here. At first, we will focus on the production of Nussbaum (2012; 2014; 2015), who compiles works related to the importance of the humanities in formal education and the issue of capabilities. Nussbaum proposes a discussion about what people are capable of being and doing, contributing to the debate regarding humanizing education in favor of democracy as a form of social justice. In a second moment, we will approach Bachelard (1996), emphasizing one of the central theses used to understand epistemological obstacles, the question of measurement. Based on the idea of measurement, as an epistemological obstacle, we show how it can reduce evaluations that use a single measurable data to obtain results that, in theory, should be deeply discussed and analyzed in order to contemplate all spheres of life.

Thus, this study aims to analyze how the idea of meritocracy in education ends up reinforcing inequality insofar as it elects limited evaluation criteria. This is a qualitative research of a hermeneutic-exploratory and theoretical-bibliographic character anchored in the writings of Nussbaum (2012; 2014; 2015), Bachelard (1996), Dubet (2004), among other authors. It seeks to answer the following question: why do educational evaluation processes based on measurements and meritocracy end up justifying inequality and promoting social injustice? The text will be organized as follows: I) initially, a general outline will be presented of some evaluation processes in education based on measurements and that promote the idea of meritocracy, emphasizing the Enem; II) next, the fallacy of measurement, based on Bachelard, and the fallacy of equal distribution, based on Nussbaum, will be presented; III) finally, some critical reflections on the measurement model of educational development in the light of the theory of capabilities will be elaborated.

### Metrics as an Evaluation Criterion and the Culture of Meritocracy in Enem

In recent decades, the Brazilian education system has turned to large-scale assessments as a criterion to “measure” the quality of education. In this movement, in the 1990s, with the government of Fernando Collor de Mello, the attempt to implement neoliberal ideology in the country began. Even with Collor's impeachment, which took place in 1992, continuity was given by Vice President Itamar Franco, who continued the privatization process, following the guidelines of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank ( BM), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), among others. In the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (FHC), the neoliberal project began to be hastily implemented: in order to “recover the 'lost time' with Brazil's late adherence to neoliberalism, the FHC government promoted a bolder privatization process” ( LIMA apud KLITZKE, VALLE, 2015, p. 228).

In this context, in the field of education, standardized assessments are created with the purpose of measuring educational performance and guaranteeing a good image of the country, in order to make it safer for international capital investments. According to Klitzke and Valle (2015), the State becomes an evaluator insofar as it develops exams as a means of measuring the performance of national education. With this, it feeds the assumption that tests, exams and other assessment instruments are the most appropriate means of measuring student performance at school and indicating the quality of teaching, based on standardized assessment criteria. Among these standardized exams, we highlight the Enem (BRASIL, 1998).

With the High School Reform of 2017, curricula were reformulated in accordance with the National High School Curriculum Guidelines (LDB — Law nº 9.394/1996), by Law nº 13.415/2017. Such changes in the curricula occurred due to economic changes, new technologies and the increase in demand for students in the basic education network. Consequently, the Enem, which until 2008 consisted of 63 interdisciplinary questions carried out in a single day, in 2009 was reformulated and started to be divided into four areas of knowledge: Languages; Natural Sciences; Human Sciences; and Mathematics and its Technologies. There are 50 questions for each area, plus an essay. With this new format, the exam is now carried out in two days.

At first, the exam was premised on social knowledge through teaching. Therefore, the training process at school should promote proactive, critical and reflective development in the individual. In contrast, the second version of the exam is modified as it proposes the external evaluation of school performance, aiming at public educational policies and losing the initial sense of self-evaluation (ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 408). The fact is that in this last version of the exam, the assessment ends up not covering all spheres of life, such as inequalities in the social, economic and cultural context, among others. Thus, “the Enem takes us to the metaphor of the race, the starting line is the same for everyone, but some are in better conditions than others to face the dispute, which leads them to arrive earlier at the end of the course” (KLITZKE, VALLE, 2015, p. 240). The metaphor used by the authors illustrates the argument proposed in this article: meritocracy ends up reinforcing inequalities, because, at the same time it hides important elements that characterize the subjects involved in the race, it naturalizes the social conditions of existence and, ideologically, makes the “losers” come to consider themselves the only ones to blame for their condition.

In this line of thought, we are faced with the limit of educational assessments, which are reduced to the point of not covering all spheres of life, sticking to meritocratic criteria. As an example, public and private school students have the same access to enrollment in assessments such as the Enem. However, conditions are unequal in the training process and, in the case of many public school students, there is a historical path of life devoid of the basic and essential conditions of existence. Thus, the inequality of conditions ends up generating a predictable process of inequality in performance. While students from the private network have better conditions to dedicate themselves to their studies, being more likely to participate

in pre-university and preparation courses for the Enem, working students who attend public schools will hardly be able to perform a good schooling and much less will be able to attend preparation courses, due to lack of time and money.

Most public school students divide their time between study and work, in order to contribute to the family income. According to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), in 2018, among students aged between 18 and 29, about 52.5% of men did not study because of work or because they were looking for a job. On the other hand, among women in the same age group, about 39.5% did not study because of household chores (G1, 2018). In the same sense, according to the Ministry of Education (2018), 1,273,250 students enrolled in Enem in 2018 had a monthly family income of up to BRL 998.00. On the other hand, 57,149 enrolled students had a family income above R\$ 19,960.00 per month. This fact corroborates the thesis that having the same opportunity to participate is not enough, but equal chances are necessary, including opportunities and preparation to compete on a level playing field. Thus, attention must be paid to the overwhelming portion of those enrolled who have a monthly income equivalent to one minimum wage per family, which conditions them to seek other means of support as a way of contributing to the family income.

Regarding this issue, the authors Klitzke and Valle (2015) analyze data that show the disparity between the results in the Enem of students belonging to different education networks and whose families have different incomes. In this analysis, when comparing the performance of students from public and private schools, the authors find that the “highest scores on the exam are from participants from private schools, that is, the minority” (Ibidem, 2015, p. 238). It is also noted that, in the 2002, 2005 and 2008 editions of the Enem, the highest percentage of participants included students from families with an income of less than five minimum wages. However, in the analysis of other data contained in pedagogical reports from the same editions, it is stated that “the best scores of the participants, that is, the performances in the objective test, are from individuals from families with incomes above ten minimum wages” (Ibidem, 2015, p. 235). Another important data to be considered, which is directly related to family income, is access to the internet, which can provide better performance in the exam, as it offers other forms of study to the participant. According to the Ministry of Education (2018), about 1,140,465 students enrolled in the 2018 Enem did not have access to the internet, which contributes to performance inequality.

In this way, the idea of meritocracy implied in the way the exam is evaluated ends up justifying inequality insofar as, regardless of the student's social condition, he has to “deserve it”. Another problem related to the evaluation proposed by the exam in search of results is the method used. The fact is that “an absolute number cannot broadly represent the entire educational evolutionary process of a student” (ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 416). Therefore, as a way of elucidating the theme, we will present an investigation about the measurement impasse involved in these forms of evaluation, promoting a reflection on it.

## Between Capabilities and the Issue of Measurement: an Obstacle to be (Re)Thought

In line with the question of measurement present in the standardized processes of educational assessment, we question how measurement can be associated with capabilities based on the following question: how is it possible to measure an individual's ability to be and do through a single numerical measure? As a way of understanding the issue, we make use of the reflections of the epistemologist and philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1996), who analyzes the fallacy of measurement as an obstacle to quantitative knowledge, arguing that “it is necessary to reflect in order to measure, instead of just measuring in order to reflect”. ” (BACHELARD, 1996, p. 262). To overcome this idea of measurement, a scientific spirit that aims at objectivity and rationality is needed. Bachelard (1996) describes the formation of a scientific thought that overcomes epistemological obstacles, indicating that such obstacles are found in the act of knowing, based on preconceived ideas. Thus, these ideas end up blocking knowledge, insofar as the obstacle of quantitative knowledge is similar to the way in which the previously mentioned forms of evaluation are conceived.

It is clear, therefore, that the “scientific spirit must raise problems, create fruitful hypotheses which should not confirm its knowledge, but contradict it” (CARDOSO, 2013, p. 19). Because of this, the author highlights the importance of describing the method of analysis more than focusing on the description of the object. Enem can be taken as an example of an exam that aims to measure performance in all areas of knowledge and that focuses more on the importance of quantitative results than on the quality of the training process. Scientific knowledge must not be based on knowledge based on measurements, but must adhere to a movement of renunciation of its own truths, which aims to break between sensitive knowledge and scientific knowledge.

Converging with Bachelardian thinking, Martha Nussbaum (2012) elucidates the issue of the fallacy of equal distribution following the same principle: a single numerical measure as a way of evaluating would neglect other important aspects to be considered. To better explain the criticism that directs this approach, Nussbaum (2012) uses as an example the education of women in India, which, with the advances in debates on gender issues, has become more valued, in contrast to what happens in several other countries where education is still heavily undervalued<sup>1</sup>. A possible way to equalize the educational opportunities offered

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to men and women would, in theory, increase investment in female education, and not just distribute resources equally for the education of subjects of both sexes. The same should happen in relation to people who need different resources to live better, in order to equalize opportunities and compensate for the social injustices of the past, which in turn ended up marginalizing certain groups.

For Nussbaum (2012), wealth and income, despite being frequently used as representative indicators of what people are capable of being and doing, should not be taken as the surest means of obtaining satisfactory results, insofar as they do not take into account that each person has different needs and, therefore, needs different resources to meet them. We have as an example the physical differences between children, adults and pregnant women, who need different amounts of protein so that their physical functioning is considerably healthy. However, in this case, public policies should not be concerned with distributing nutrition resources equally, but with providing more to those who need it most as a way of matching them to those who have the most and, in this way, safeguarding the principle of equity. In this sense, it is noted that the approach based on the equal distribution of resources contributes to the permanence of the status quo, because if those who already have a lot receive something they don't even need, inequality increases even more.

In our analysis, we identified a certain convergence between the fallacy of measurement, by Bachelard (1996), and the fallacy of equal distribution, by Nussbaum: measurement based on a single numerical measure obtained from quantitative criteria in evaluations in education would become a knowledge that is too vague and reduced because it does not cover all spheres of life, neglecting important aspects, especially social, cultural and economic inequality. Highlighting the contributions of the highlighted authors, proposing a cut on the Enem issue and showing that evaluating the results obtained in the exam with a single numerical measure reinforces meritocracy as a performance criterion, we found that the exam ends up becoming “a mere uncritical exercise, being standardized, robotic and covered by the prism of meritocracy” (ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 418). The way in which the exam has changed over time has consolidated it as a means of entering higher education; however, there are still large disparities in the results when comparing students from public and private schools.

Thus, it is clear the importance of (re)thinking the processes that underlie educational assessments through the idea of “deserving”, which legitimizes injustices and promotes the maintenance of the status quo. In an attempt to break with the logic of measurement, the theory of capabilities, proposed by Nussbaum (2012), strives to question the idea of meritocracy, which justifies current inequalities. Such a theory questions the extent to which it is possible to measure what the individual is capable of being and doing. From this, it is necessary to rethink the issue of measurement based on meritocracy in educational assessments such as Enem; after all, having the same opportunity to participate does not imply having equality of performance.



## Reflections on the Educational Measurement Model in the Light of Capabilities Theory

Regarding capabilities and the issue of measurement, Nussbaum (2012) sticks to two questions: what are people really capable of being and doing? And what are the real opportunities for choice and action that society offers them? Based on these questions, the author highlights, through the comparative theory of quality of life demonstrated by Sen, how heterogeneity makes it impossible to measure opportunities and capabilities. By evidencing such impossibility of measurement, Nussbaum criticizes the approaches that mix all spheres of life and transform them into a single measurable data, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). From this perspective, we can think about the issue of Enem, considering that it is considered a way of evaluating the capacities of individuals that reduces the results to a single numerical measure. This measure, in turn, ends up disregarding the more expanded capacities of the students and the existing inequalities in the process.

In this perspective, Almeida (2020) draws attention to the different realities of students, related to cultural, social and economic spheres. Such realities, because they are not equally fair, end up unleveling the chances that students have of obtaining the desired performance; “thus, it becomes unusual to equate, in an illustrative way, a student from a school whose focus is moral or social-critical training with one who has a technical education, aimed at solving Enem issues” (ALMEIDA, 2020, p. 417). Accordingly, Nussbaum (2015) highlights the importance of considering two aspects: the individual and the situation. In addition to considering the individual's situation, individual differences must be considered, as experiences influence the psychological aspects of each one.

In this context, we can reflect on the Enem, insofar as “critical reasoning and empathic imagination cannot be measured through quantitative multiple-choice tests” (NUSSBAUM, 2015, p. 134). This measurement method ends up not contemplating what the individual is capable of being and doing. Through advances in the learning process, arranged in the self-assessment method (present in Enem until 2008), the critical-reflexive development of the student is contemplated. This method is guided by education as a way of detaching and perceiving the relations of power, human emancipation and de-alienation, thus advancing towards the construction of an autonomous and humanizing knowledge. The capabilities that Nussbaum (2012) proposes aim at a humanizing and sensitive education, through the arts and humanities, which would be able to free us from a mechanized and standardized education whose sole purpose is to make students perform well in assessments. This humanizing education would be a more correct way of showing what each one is really capable of being and doing, indicating how much a student is qualified and if he is able to enter higher education, for example.

On the other hand, the first Enem proposal became a simple, technician and mechanized assessment instrument. It lost its humanizing ideal, succumbing to the demand of the job market, which increasingly demands education/training, making subjects adaptable to

these demands. This proposed evaluation measurement method evidences what Bachelard (1996, p. 261) denounces when he says that “to measure exactly a fleeting or indeterminate object, to measure exactly a fixed and well-determined object with a crude instrument, are two types of useless operation, that the scientific discipline outright rejects.

We will hardly have a better and fairer school if we continue to bet on meritocracy. Dubet himself (2004, p. 542) recognizes that “the purely meritocratic conception of school justice faces great difficulties and, even if we accept the principle, it is clear that it must be considered”. He himself observes that “the Sociology of Education shows that the opening of a space of objective school competition does not eliminate inequalities” (DUBET, 2004, p. 542), and here both inequalities between people and inequalities between people are at stake, sexes and social groups, with the most favored having decisive advantages. It is fallacious to say that equal opportunities for access to schooling eliminates school inequalities.

Dubet (2004, p. 542) also points out that “an equality of meritocratic opportunities presupposes, to be fair, a perfectly equal and objective school offer”. However, what we see and what almost all research shows is that “the school treats disadvantaged students less well”, that is, the teaching teams are less stable, there is no family support for the students and the attention given to students are different. In Dubet's own words (2004, p. 543): “the more favored the environment from which the student originates, the greater his probability of being a good student, the more he is a good student, the greater his possibility of accessing a better education”. In this sense, there is “a certain cruelty of the meritocratic model”, because “the 'losers', the students who fail, are no longer seen as victims of social injustice, but as responsible for their own failure”. This condition of taking responsibility for one's own failure has perverse effects on students' self-esteem, making them often renounce school and embrace violence. By preventing them from realizing that their failure may be due to social inequalities and a set of other variables, meritocracy reinforces inequalities.

Another equally relevant problem of the meritocratic principle implies a set of problems in the pedagogical scope. As Dubet (2004, p. 543) emphasizes, “the meritocratic principle presupposes that all those involved in the same competition are submitted to the same tests”. However, when the competition starts, differences immediately surface; “those who are unable to continue competing” become discouraged, feel powerless, unprepared and even “dishearten their teachers”; thus, they are left aside, marginalized and forgotten. In the end, the meritocratic system reinforced the inequalities that already existed, with the difference that now the victory of the winners was deserved.

Dubet (2004, p. 544) ends his reflections by raising some questions about virtue and the very idea of merit: “Is merit something other than the transformation of inheritance into individual virtue? Is it something other than a way of legitimizing inequalities and the power of leaders?”. And, following in the footsteps of John Rawls, he still asks: “does merit really exist?”, “can it be measured objectively?”, “can it be applied to children and up to what age?”, “If we are not responsible for our birth, how can we be responsible for our gifts and aptitudes?”. These are profound, thought-provoking, provocative and timely questions that

converge with the thinking of Nussbaum (2015, p. 135), who states that, “in the United States, the national exam [...] has made things worse, as usually happens. with the national exams”. Such dimensions are completely ignored in standardized exams. However, it would be these dimensions that would make it possible, for example, for children and young people to become aware of social inequalities, that the meritocratic narrative is cruel and illusory, that school life can be more intense and creative than a simple preparation for standardized exams. Unfortunately, in the case of Brazil, we are heading in the opposite direction of this possibility.

## Final Considerations

Within the limits of this text, we show that standardized exams such as the Enem, which use a single numerical measure as a result, end up reinforcing inequality when they elect limited evaluation criteria and are based on meritocracy as a way of legitimizing inequality and social justice, for through the justification of a good performance of “deserving it”. In this perspective, we also emphasize the importance of the theory of capabilities in the framework that questions meritocracy in education. Such meritocracy consists of a form of inequality, preventing people from living with dignity to the extent that evaluation systems end up being limited and unfair, as they do not take into account the differences of each individual and their material conditions of existence. We also consider that the different cannot be compared as equals, insofar as “the capacities that are of central importance to people differ qualitatively from each other and not only quantitatively”, so that “they cannot be redoubled on a single scale”. without being distorted, and that a fundamental part of their adequate understanding and production is to understand the specific nature of each one of them” (NUSSBAUM, 2012, p. 38, our translation). It is difficult for a standardized test or exam guided by the principle of meritocracy to contemplate these specificities.

A fair school, guided by the capabilities perspective, should not screen individuals to know who will succeed and who will not; it should not be the judging institution that sentences the victors and the vanquished, the deserving and the undeserving. A school that promotes and develops skills should be less focused on defining castes of excellence and more concerned with not stigmatizing “weak students”, who often drop out of school because they do not feel sufficiently understood. As Dubet (2004) points out, “a mass ‘meritocratic’ school necessarily creates ‘losers’, failed students, less good and less worthy students. ‘Success for all’ is an empty slogan, as it contradicts the meritocratic principles on which the school is founded”. A school focused on meritocracy and competition does not worry about the “losers” and the losers, as it assumes that they are responsible for their own failure, that they did not try hard enough and that they were not able to take advantage of the opportunities. Even dropping out of school is seen as a process of naturalizing the logic of losers and winners. Thus, the school guided by meritocracy not only reproduces inequalities but also produces stigmatization and devaluation of failed individuals, deepening inequalities even more.

Instead of defending and spreading the idea of a meritocratic school, we should defend and promote the idea of a fair school. And what would be the characteristics of this school? Would it take care of promoting strategic aspects for “weak” students? Would it be a school that treats “loser” students well, that does not humiliate them, that helps them understand that they are not the only ones to blame for their failures? Would it be a school that respects and promotes the dignity of its students, seeks to perceive capabilities that are most often not perceived, or that are partially disregarded in standardized measurement tests? In the words of Dubet (2004, p. 552), “a fair school would better preserve the dignity and self-esteem of those who were not successful as expected”, it would be able to promote certain actions that could direct a closer look “to the talents of students” and would give visibility to the “affirmation of the educational role of the school”. Thus, Dubet (2004, p. 552-553) reinforces that the ideal will be achieved “when it is thought that the school should educate all students regardless of their school performance, [...] when students are treated as subjects in evolution and not just as students engaged in a competition”.

In short, the measurement system in education carries with it several limitations for considering that all people have the same opportunities and for not taking into account the particular nature of each subject. Nussbaum (2014) considers the relationship between the humanities and the arts to be an important pillar of education for citizenship. Therefore, educational policies, according to the philosopher, must cultivate such areas for democracy to survive (NUSSBAUM, 2014). In this way, a humanizing education based on capabilities should instill in the student the habit of questioning himself, especially about his beliefs and what is imposed on him. It is through the restlessness of asking oneself that misconceptions, prejudices and injustices will be avoided. When reflecting on their current practices, the subject will consequently change their future practices, as such reflection, in addition to providing self-examination, also causes a change in attitudes, an awareness and accountability for their own acts. The individual then becomes responsible for his own freedom.

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