Critical Discourse Analysis: between Journalism and Education

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This research, in which we used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) applied to the field of Educational Sciences, was developed within the scope of the project of PhD in Education. We submit the question - what relations can be identified between opinion articles concerning Education published in two broadsheet newspapers and the values and aspirations defended by the new middle class? It is our belief that it is essential to understand the intentions and the consequences of opinion articles related to the school.

We look at the school from an outside point of view: the discourse of opinion articles published by two Portuguese broadsheets newspapers: Diário de Notícias and Público, between October 2004 and September 2006. The readers of the two chosen newspapers belong predominantly to the most privileged social classes and are attentive to the school journey of their children.

The discourse of opinion articles published in Diário de Notícias and Público was taken as the object of study, with a view to understanding opinion makers’ reasons for writing about education, as well as the consequences their articles can have in the community. However, opinion articles assume in this investigation the place of instruments of research, because through them we intend to achieve many of the objectives outlined, for instance, to confirm the hypothesis under study.

A quantitative methodology was used, and the directors of the newspapers studied were interviewed — this stage allowed us to understand possible intentions and consequences of the opinion articles studied —, as well as parents and teachers. CDA was used on the 20 opinion articles chosen as corpus of this study.

The investigation has initially founded on Basil Bernstein, who studied the middle class, and Phillip Brown, because some of the opinion articles studied allow us to raise the hypothesis that they assume and legitimize parentocracy, a concept introduced by Brown (1990) to refer to describe parents’ greater participation in their children’s school life, namely the free choice of the school they will attend. These articles have allowed us to understand how parents’ expectations regarding their children’s educational plan can be shaped and even legitimized by opinion makers.

However, other articles seem to defend that the investment in school capital is made through a knowledge-centred pedagogy, coming close to the demands of meritocracy. Therefore, the idea that parents are allowed to choose a school for their children to attend may be a way of implementing a stratified system, with an increase in social privileges for those who already have them. Conversely, the school may be understood as an element that can effectively promote standards of justice inherent to a democratic society.

We consider that the conclusions reached may make a small contribution to the debate on education and citizenship besides highlighting the importance of the study of Critical Discourse Analysis, as methodology for research in education.

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